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ABOVE SUSPICION.

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ABOVE SUSPICION.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

"GEORGE GEITH," "TOO MUCH ALONE," "HOME, SWEET HOME,"

"THE EARL'S PROMISE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1876.

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251. d. 333

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ABOVE SUSPICION.



CHAPTER I.

ABOUT WEST GREEN AND TOTTENHAM AND THE SHOEING OF A HORSE.

SIXTEEN years ago no more rural village could have been found within five miles of the General Post Office than West Green. It was as utterly in the country as though situated a hundred miles from London, and by a natural consequence it was country in its ways, habits, and manners.

The various lanes leading to it from

Stamford Hill, Tottenham, Hornsey, and Southgate were rural, which they certainly are not now. In those days Philip Lane was not a street, with houses all along one side, as is the case at present. Neither had any building societies invaded the sacred quiet of the road, bordered by wheat-fields and meadows, which led off to the Queen's Head, then as pretty a roadside public as the heart of traveller need have desired to see—now refronted, redecorated, provided with tea-gardens and other modern innovations of a like description.

As for Hanger Lane, no one had yet dreamed of the evil days to come, when mushroom villas should be built upon ground that not long before was regarded as an irreclaimable morass—when first a tavern and then a church (the two invariable pioneers of that which, for some

unknown reason, we call civilization) appeared on the scene, and brought London following at their heels—when the common lands were inclosed and laid out in plots on which more houses were erected—when little by-roads were made leading to meadows then innocent of brick and mortar, but soon destined to be covered with small two-storey tenements—when, in a word, Hanger Lane should be improved off the face of the earth, and in the interests of speculative builders (who had come entirely of their own accord to spoil it), called as it is at present, St. Anne's Road.

Everything is done very quickly nowadays, and it has only taken sixteen years to change West Green from an extremely pretty village to an eminently undesirable suburb.

The familiar omnibus still passes

through it twice a day, once going to London, once returning from it, but it does so empty of passengers ; and if the proprietor could only find a loophole in a certain will which might enable him to cease running it altogether, he would esteem himself a very happy man.

A new station has been opened quite close to the village. New streets—hideous streets—debouch on the once pleasant green ; the old horse-pond which used periodically to overflow and spread half across the highway is now fenced in with unpicturesque railing ; and there is little left to tell of the pretty little hamlet which used, in the early spring, to look so sweet and countrified with the hawthorn bushes, and the lilacs and laburnums all blossoming for flower.

Gone is the primitive post-office kept at a cottage, where a customer could

purchase hot rolls on one side of the passage, and postage stamps in the parlour on the other—gone like the post-master, who worked hard at his trade as a baker all the while he held that ill-paid appointment under Government; and the pretty young girls, his daughters, who were, oh! so very pretty, but who, like their father, died one after another of consumption. Gone, too, are the old residents who lived in the few eligible houses dotted round and about the green.

The old village is still there, but it is huddled up amongst Streets, and Villas, and Places, and Groves, and all the other devices of modern investors; and those who can remember West Green in the olden time, and to whom the memory of it returns softly and gratefully like the recollection of some sunny picture, may well wish never to look upon it again.

So far I have spoken of the place as it was within my own recollection, when, after traversing part of Hanger Lane, any one coming from London turned off along a road exactly opposite to an old picturesque wooden house, shaded from the road by chestnut-trees and evergreens, and, wending his way under branching elms, emerged finally upon the green, and in front of the Black Boy public-house. But at the period this story opens, West Green was a much more retired spot than at the date indicated—eighteen hundred and fifty-nine.

Tottenham High Cross, as it is styled in the ancient histories, was itself a very quiet and secluded country town. The northern coaches had ceased running through it, and in lieu thereof the Great Eastern Railway had cut a line parallel with the old highway straight through

the valley of the Lea. In accordance, however, with those principles to which for so many years the Great Eastern Railway Company have remained faithful—the latest development of which principles can be inspected at the new Bishopsgate Station, where no provision has been made for an up-platform—they carefully placed the Tottenham Station so far from the town as to be practically useless to all the inhabitants save those who lived round and about the Hale; and therefore, to all intents and purposes, Tottenham was a more out-of-the-world place after trains began to run to it than it was before. For which reason, any person, whether labourer, skilled workman, or trader, who could form a connection amongst the independent gentry, the City magnates, and the Quaker families who then tenanted the great

brick mansions which are still to be met with in that neighbourhood, had a very fair chance indeed of making a comfortable living, and in many cases of putting by sums of money which seemed large in the primeval days of which I am writing. It was a much easier thing, in fact, for a man to drop on his feet in remote ages dating a generation back than is the case at present. There was more space for people then. If a person had special knowledge on any subject, he could find some one who wanted to use him ; and if he were clever as an artificer, if he were ready and active, and civil and reasonable, why, he might compass a good deal in the way of success, as success counted then.

In the opinion of West Green, where he lived, and its neighbour Tottenham, where he had lived, Miles Barthorne had

compassed a success quite unprecedented in the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

There were, as is usual, various versions of his antecedents. According to some, he had appeared traversing the mail-road to London without a shoe to his foot or a coat to his back. According to others, he was attired like a gentleman when he made his first great *coup*, and had so drawn greater attention to himself than would have proved the case had he appeared in the conventional rags and been possessed of the regulation two-pence halfpenny which mean future civic honours and the applause of kings and aldermen.

Miles Barthorne, however, made his first step along a road which conducted him ultimately neither to the Mansion House nor St. James', in the garb of a well-to-do traveller. He was not clad

in purple and fine linen ; but there was no evidence of poverty in the man's dress or appearance.

Having elected to walk to London—which even now might, on occasion, be a wise procedure for those coming to seek their fortune in the metropolis—he was trudging through Tottenham, when his attention was attracted by a concourse of idlers surrounding a man and horse and smithy.

The horse had cast a shoe, and could go no farther ; the smith was ill, and his men were out ; the traveller was angry, and the farrier's wife tearful. All this Miles Barthorne grasped as he stood and listened to the expostulations and the lamentations ; and when he had grasped it, he made his way through the gaping, staring throng, and doffing his cap to the traveller, said :

“With your leave, sir, and that of the sick man’s wife, I can put your horse’s shoe on if she lends me the use of the forge and her husband’s tools.”

“You!” remarked the rider, in amazement.

“You, good gentleman!” supplemented the farrier’s wife.

In answer to the first remark, Miles Barthorne pulled off his coat and turned up his shirt sleeves, thereby exhibiting a breadth of chest and development of muscle calculated to inspire confidence in the breast of the owner of the horse which had cast a shoe; and at the same time, in reply to Mrs. Dorman, the smith’s wife, he said:

“I am not a gentleman, though if every one had his rights I suppose I should be; I was brought up like one. Nevertheless, I can shoe a horse as well

as your husband, let him shoe as well as he may."

And with that he picked up hoof after hoof of the steed, which all this time stood quiet enough, perhaps liking the excitement as well as the rest, which is the nature of some animals. When he had set down the last, which happened to be the near hind foot, he said with a smile :

"Have you the shoe, sir?"

"No, that I have not," was the reply. "He cast it somewhere on the road—where, I have no idea."

"Then you had better have a new set all round. Look here;" and with a "Woa!" which conciliated the horse, he held up the animal's feet one after the other, for inspection. "Come, sir, they won't cost you more than a shilling apiece, and you and your beast will travel

all the happier. I am a stranger hereabouts, and know not the name of any good inn; but if there be such, I will bring the horse to you in an hour's time—no less—no more."

"Agreed," was the answer. "I will go back to the Rose and Crown, and you can bring the horse there as you propose."

Now, the shoeing of that horse proved an immense sensation to the population.]

The news spread that in Dorman's smithy a strange man was shoeing a horse for a traveller, and straightway every idler flocked to see, and criticised the work freely.

"Hey, lad, where wert thou apprenticed?" asked an old carter. "Who ever heard of shoeing a horse with cold iron?"

"Wiser folks than thou wilt ever be," answered Miles Barthorne with a quick

mimicry, which set the spectators in a roar. "When thou goest to the cobbler, does he make thy foot to fit his shoe, or his shoe to fit thy foot? I deal with my horses as he does with thy feet; though had I such feet as thine to shoe, they would drive me distraught." And so he went on talking, blowing, hammering, cooling, nailing, till the town was in an uproar between delight and dismay.

When he had finished he sought out Mrs. Dorman, and would have placed four shillings in her hand, but the woman refused it, saying :

"My husband would like to speak with you, sir, if you can spare a minute."

To which he replied, "I will be back when I have taken the horse to its owner and got the money he agreed to pay."

Saying which, he clapped the saddle on the animal, drew up the girths, slipped

on the bridle, and then, having previously inquired his way to the Rose and Crown, jumped on the horse's back and set off, not at a gallop, but at a quiet trot, to the Rose and Crown, where he received four shillings for Mrs. Dorman's benefit, and half-a-crown for the benefit of himself.

"You are a likely fellow," said the traveller, looking Barthorne over from head to foot, "and should do some good for yourself in life."

"I shall try to do so," was the reply. Already Miles Barthorne understood fortune had done him a friendly turn, and that he had travelled a considerable number of miles that day along the road to success.

CHAPTER II.

MR. DORMAN MAKES TWO DISCOVERIES.

MILES BARTHORNE retraced his way to the smith's shop, followed thither by curious glances from the older inhabitants and a train of boys and children of both sexes. He had been accustomed, however, to that peculiarity of country life which causes persons to take more interest in the most trivial affairs of their neighbours than in the serious affairs of their own, and he was not therefore disconcerted by the attention paid him, as might have been the case had he chanced to have been born in London.

When he arrived at the smith's house, he found Mrs. Dorman waiting his return.

"Will you please step this way, sir?" she said. "My husband bid me tell you his sickness was nothing catching."

"If it had been, I should not be afraid of catching it," Barthorne answered, a little contemptuously. "But what does ail him, mistress?"

"A weakness of the chest," was the reply. "He caught a cold last winter, and has never been the same man since. Sometimes he can scarcely draw his breath for pain."

"A bad complaint for a man who has to stand much over the fire," commented the stranger, as he felt his way up the dark staircase, and followed Mrs. Dorman along a narrow passage, at the end of which she opened the door of a room where the sick man lay.

Though the apartment was small, the furniture it contained indicated that the smith had been well to do, and was still in fairly comfortable circumstances.

Barthorne cast a rapid glance around, and guessed this fact; while the woman, stepping up to the four-post bedstead with its heavy moreen curtains, announced his presence by saying—

“This is the gentleman who shod the traveller’s horse.”

“Ay,” said the other feebly. “Would you mind coming a bit nearer, sir? Polly, had not you better be minding the shop? Women,” he added, as the door closed behind her, speaking apologetically to the stranger, “are like children—they aye want to stay where they are least wanted.”

“If every one were of my mind, they would be wanted nowhere,” answered

Barthorne, with an abrupt decision of manner remarkable in so young a man.

"You have been crossed in love, most like," conjectured the smith.

"If I have not been crossed in that, I have in something else," was the answer. "But you wanted to speak to me. What have you to say?"

"I want to thank you for your kindness," began Dorman, with a certain hesitation.

"I do not see why you should," replied the stranger. "I was on my way to look for work, and work offered; and I have been well paid for it. See!" And he took four shillings from his pocket, and laid them on the coverlet. "That is your share," he said; and then he took out the half-crown, and spun it in the air, dexterously catching it as it came down. "And this is mine," he finished.

The sick man looked at him thoughtfully.

"I should not have taken you for a smith," he said.

"I am one, though, by trade," answered Barthorne. "I served a regular apprenticeship. See, here is my character from my master;" and he pulled out a pocket-book, and from it drew out a letter, which Dorman read slowly and with difficulty twice over.

"Seven years as apprentice, three as foreman," he spelled out.

"That is right," agreed the other, "and ready now to take any berth that offers at the forge, or bench, or vice. I can work at them all."

Once again Dorman looked curiously, almost suspiciously, at the dark, gipsy face, the thick black hair, the stalwart frame of the man who sat beside his bed.

"Would you take service with me?" he asked when he had quite finished his scrutiny.

"I have no objection to try your service," returned the other carelessly. "I can leave if I do not find it or you to my taste. I had, indeed, purposed going on to London; but I dare say this country place will be more to my mind than the close city streets, at this time of the year especially." And he walked, as he concluded, to the window, which commanded a view over market-gardens, and the valley of the Lea, and the wide expanse of land lying under the summer sunshine between Tottenham and the blue hills of Essex.

"You have not spoken about wages," suggested the smith.

"And neither need you till I have been with you a week. At the end of that

time you will know what I can do, and I shall know whether we are likely to suit each other. For that week you can pay me what you like."

"You are a queer customer, I think," remarked Dorman.

"That will not signify to you if you find me a good workman," retorted the stranger.

When, in the course of further conversation, Barthorne asked his new employer if he could recommend him a decent lodging—inns, the stranger explained, were not much to his taste—Dorman said hospitably that his wife could no doubt manage to house him, for a time at all events; but the other shook his head.

"Had I never lived under the same roof with Hal Glendy," he remarked, "I might, had it so pleased me, have gone

on working for him till the crack of doom. No, master, thank you all the same; but, in my humble opinion, master, and man, and mistress, are best separate out of working hours."

"You are too far-sighted for me," replied the sick man wearily; "and I cannot say I just understand your notions or your talk clearly; but, as you observe, if you work that is all I need care about; and if you are, as I suppose, too high in your way to be altogether neighbourly, why, no offence on either side. If none has been given, none has been taken."

"None has been given to me, at any rate," returned the younger man, with more heartiness of manner than he had yet exhibited; "and so long as I work for you at all, I will work well and honestly. There is my hand on it;" and he stretched out a hand, hard and

brown, and yet for that of a man who had followed such a calling singularly small.

As the blacksmith took it in his, he said, "Why, it is no bigger than a woman's. It is lost like in mine."

"It can do some work, though," answered Barthorne, smiling, "as you shall see."

And Mr. Dorman did see. Before the end of three months his trade had doubled; and though he could not do much himself, money had never been so plentiful.

When he made up his books each week, which he did, I regret to say, for the sake of greater quietness, every Sunday morning, his heart sank within him lest his new man should give warning. He had paid him liberally and treated him well, and allowed him to discharge idle hands and take on others at his

pleasure, but still Dorman felt such a treasure was not likely to remain with him for ever on unequal terms; and he would have proposed "going shares" with him, or even suggested that they should become "pardners," but for that vague uneasy feeling of "not understanding so queer a fellow" which had oppressed him at their first interview.

And indeed it was not for want of conjugal spurring that the blacksmith held back. Mrs. Dorman was always urging upon him the expediency of securing Barthorne.

"You will find he will be snapped up by somebody who understands his value," she was in the habit of remarking; and Mr. Dorman, who recognized the likelihood of her prophecy being fulfilled, always promised to "think the matter over."

“These sort of things ain’t to be done in a hurry, Polly,” he would say, refilling his pipe; and she would say, with a snort and a flounce—

“Well, you will find his going can be done in a hurry some fine morning, and then perhaps you will be sorry you did not turn yourself round quicker.”

“That may all be, Polly,” he agreed philosophically; “but, upon the other hand, it may not.”

Which proposition being unanswerable, drove Mrs. Dorman to the verge of despair.

How long Mr. Dorman might have dallied with the question, had his man not broached it himself, it is impossible to conjecture.

One dreary Saturday in December, said Barthorne, heating his horse-shoes in the fire, to his master idly blowing the bel-

lows—which, though an undignified, was a congenial occupation—"I wish you would go to church to-morrow morning, I want to speak to you."

"All right!" agreed the other; "but do you really mean to church?"

"Yes!" was the answer, "and I can walk part of the way home with you; only remember to say nothing about this indoors, or else Mrs. Dorman will be wanting to make one of the party, and three are no company, so far as I ever heard."

"I will say nothing about the matter to her," Dorman replied, and he kept his word; for he had an intuitive feeling Barthorne wanted to speak to him concerning business which might be best transacted without assistance from the lady, who certainly ruled Dorman's domestic roast.

"Let us walk towards White Hart Lane," suggested the man, and the master assenting, they left the old churchyard behind and paced slowly, having stood aside to permit those of the congregation whose way home led them along the same path to take precedence of them, over the damp fields in the direction Barthorne had indicated.

When they were left quite alone, when the meadow path held no more sign of life than the walk leading round the ivy-covered tower, Barthorne opened his mouth.

"Have you ever thought of selling your business?" he asked.

"No, I hain't," replied Mr. Dorman.

"Will you think of selling it now?"

"I see no call to do so," was the answer.

For half a dozen yards they paced on

together in silence, then Barthorne inquired—

“Am I to take that as final?”

“I dunno what you mean by final,” said Mr. Dorman sullenly.

“What I mean by final is, that you have not thought of selling your business, and that you will not think of doing so,” explained Barthorne.

“I see no call why I should,” repeated Mr. Dorman.

“Well, there is no particular reason, certainly,” was the reply, “except that if you will not sell your business, I can take it from you without purchase. I have but to open another place, and all your customers will come flocking to me—I need not pay you a penny for goodwill, for I have the good will of the neighbourhood already; but you treated me fairly, and I don’t want to treat you

unfairly. Your health is not good, and it is not likely to be much better so long as you remain near London. Shouldn't you like a change? Come, I will make you a bid: I will give you fifty pounds for your business, and take the lease and tools and fixtures at a sum to be agreed on between us—your furniture I do not want. Will you strike a bargain?"

"I had liefer have you for a pardner," exclaimed Mr. Dorman, breaking out into a profuse perspiration caused by the agony he experienced in making the proposition, and the fear he felt that his man might accept his offer.

But on the latter score he need have suffered no uneasiness; nothing on earth save heaven was farther from Barthorne's mind than any compromise of the sort, and he said so frankly.

"I will either be your successor or

your opponent," he replied. "Think the matter over for four and twenty hours, and then let me know whether we are to be friends or foes—at peace or at war."

"I have treated you fairly," expostulated the smith.

"And I have worked for you honestly," retorted his man.

"And I think we might do a good stroke together as pardners," suggested Mr. Dorman.

"Perhaps we might; but I won't be your partner," replied Barthorne.

"Will you tell me why?"

"For one reason, I would rather be working for myself than for myself and another."

"And what is the next reason?"

"None that I need tell to you," was the curt reply.

And with matters remaining in this

unsatisfactory state, they parted—Barthorne professing an intention of walking back by Wood Green, and Mr. Dorman, only too glad to be rid of his company, declaring he would take the shortest way home, which for once chanced to be by following the high-road.

He was not a strong man, and he knew he had not the faintest chance of success if his new man started an opposition smithy. Nevertheless, his heart clung to Tottenham and his smith's shop, and even for fifty pounds he was loath to leave either.

Nor was Mrs. Dorman one whit behind her husband in lamentations and regrets.

So earnestly she besought him to make any sacrifice rather than leave the neighbourhood, that Dorman went that night to bed determined to offer Barthorne even two-thirds of the profits,

rather than separate his fortunes from those of the new-comer.

Whether it was owing to the fact of his having partaken of a hot supper late, or of his having retired to rest early, Mr. Dorman never could tell; but hours before daylight the next morning he woke with a sense of horrible oppression about his chest—with a feeling of some dreadful misery having come upon him about his heart.

For a few seconds he lay battling with his waking mind against his sleeping, as people often do in such extremity, then he turned and felt for something human and tangible to reassure him, but he felt vacancy—his wife's place was empty.

"Polly," he said, "Polly dear," but Polly never answered.

Then—he never could tell afterwards what made him do it, though he under-

stood an impulse beyond his own power of self-control was urging him on—he got up, and partly dressed, and stole like a thief along the passage, and down the staircase, and across the parlour, and so into a little office beyond adjoining the shop.

Yes, his intuition had been right—the door of communication was ajar, and the forge fire alight. He could hear his wife's voice, and the whoo-of of the bellows. Oh! that thrice-accursed Barthorne. He would have his life. Standing there in the darkness, Dorman swore to himself, nothing save the spilling of that strange man's blood could cool the fever raging in his own. But he would not be in a hurry; he had never been in a hurry yet—not even in proposing to the woman who was false to him; so he waited for a minute, first to recover his

breath, and then to decide on his future conduct, and while he waited he heard his wife say—

“I don’t know why you are so cruel to me.”

“I am not a bit cruel to you,” was the sharp reply, uttered in a pause of the bellows’ blowing. “I’d be cruel to you if I took you at your word, and let you leave a better man than I ever was or shall be for the sake of a stranger you have taken a fancy to. But it is of no use your plaguing my life out in this way. If I loved you as much as—I do not love you—if I hated your husband as much as I like and respect the man, I would not ask you to leave him for anything you could offer. I have my work cut out, and I do not intend that any woman shall come between me and its execution. Now, will you stand

back? if you do not the sparks may burn you."

"I wish they might," she answered, "and then you would be sorry for your hard-heartedness."

"I should not be sorry if they burnt you to death, mistress," he said angrily. "If there had never been women like you to tempt men, I should not have been hammering on a smith's anvil now. By ——," and he swore an oath which sounded fearful to the weak and shuddering listener, "if I was your husband I'd thrash this nonsense out of you, if I killed you in the process."

"I would rather be killed by you than kissed by him," she answered with an unconscious alliteration.

Barthorne flung his irons back into the fire, and, advancing straight to where she stood crying and sobbing, took her by the shoulder.

“Now look here,” he said, “I have had more than enough of this love-making; and if you went on with it for ever you would never win a love look from me. I don’t like you—I didn’t like you from the first day we met. I am a trifle too dark myself to care for brown eyes and black hair. When I fall in love, which at present I never intend to do, it shall be with a woman whose eyes are blue as heaven, and whose cheeks are as white as snow. So now good morning and good-bye. I shall take the liberty of screwing a bolt on the inside of this door while I remain here, and if you give me any further trouble I shall tell your husband why I found it necessary to do so.”

“Great heavens,” he added, as she went along the passage, her progress facilitated by a push from him, “that

men should peril their interests for such cattle—for such cattle!” and he was so overwhelmed with the absurdity of the idea, that he sat down on the anvil and let his fire out while he thought the matter over.

“I don’t believe one bit about the serpent tempting Eve,” he considered. “I believe she must have been one of those stealing, artful sort of women who, finding her husband a fool, as he undoubtedly was, and the serpent clever, as he certainly must have been, played up to him, and manœuvred about till she got his secret, when, woman like, she pitched him over. Well, I suppose they are necessary evils, but they are evils. Till I am laid in my coffin it will always baffle me to comprehend why God made women. There, now, that woman has made me neglect my work.”

And he rose and re-kindled his fire, and did what his hand found to do, unconscious of the misery which that morning had brought to one heart he would willingly have kept from trouble. For he really did like his master. And when, my reader, you come to know what the man's nature had been, and was, you may be inclined to score a few points in his favour on that account.

The same day, when he went to his dinner, Dorman followed him to his lodging.

"I have been thinking," he began, "about that there offer o' yourn, and p'rhaps, as I ain't so handy as I were, I might do worse nor close on it."

"I think you might," was the calm reply.

"Well then, I will, and so no more need be said. Fifty pounds for the goodwill; and lease and plant we can agree

upon, and I will go away and interfere with ye never more."

"That is it," said Barthorne in confirmation.

"And, neighbour, so long as we are talking, I want to tell you I heard what passed between you and my wife this morning."

"More is the pity," was the comment.

"And I bear you no ill-will, mate, for the evil you have wrought—though, God knows, I understand you as little now as I did the first day you crossed my threshold. I canno' tell how it has all come to pass—I canno'. I married my wife for love, and she married me for the same—or I thought she did. Since we came together she has never lacked bite nor sup; she has lived on the best; she has two silk gowns now, and her watch and chain like a lady, and—and——"

At this point he buried his face in his hands and sobbed aloud, Barthorne never interposing ; but when he had indulged his grief for more than a sufficient period, his successor slapped him on the shoulder, and said :—

“Take her away from here—take her among her own people, if she has any ; she will outlive this folly, and be to you a better wife in the future than she ever was before she understood all men might not be of your mind. And as for the bother and the shame, friend, I would have kept both from you if I could ; and I am not likely, unless your mistress trouble me hereafter, to make either public.”

“Heaven bless you for that !”

“Amen. Have you anything more to say ?” seeing his visitor hesitate.

“Nothing, except this. This forenoon

I met a man from your parts, and asked him if he had known a smith called Barthorne at Spindlethorpe. In answer he said, 'No. A man of the name of Glendy was the only smith at Spindlethorpe, but I might have made a mistake. Four miles off, at Abbotsleigh, there was a place owned by a Squire Barthorne——'"

"Yes?" interrogated his man.

"Was that squire kith or kin to you?" asked Dorman.

"I do not know which squire you are talking about," was the reply; "but a squire of Abbotsleigh was my father. You have the mystery and its solution at last," he observed with bitterness.

Whereupon Mr. Dorman, suddenly oppressed by the atmosphere of gentility by which he had unconsciously been surrounded for so many months, beat an unceremonious retreat.

CHAPTER III.

MILES BARTHORNE'S PARENTAGE.

THERE were persons residing in and around Abbotsleigh who would have said Miles Barthorne had no right to so call himself; but in this they were wrong. He had as much right to that name as to any other. Conversely, however, he had as much right to any other as to that, which, after all, is not a nice kind of inheritance for any man.

Had Lucy Sanson been as prudent as she was pretty, no scandal would have attached itself to the memory of Squire

Miles Barthorne, who slept as quietly in the family vault as Lucy did in her grave in a foreign land.

There could be no question but that the Squire would have married her had she played her cards properly ; but she did not play them with the slightest wisdom, and the result proved Miles, junior, who, except by the Squire's favour, could not be regarded as his eldest son, or, in fact, as any son at all.

How this came to pass was as follows. The Squire's mother, a Scotch lady, had brought with her to the Hall a maid called Glendy, Presbyterian, prim, precise, honest beyond belief, disagreeable beyond the power of expression.

She arrived at Abbotsleigh when she was very young, and she stayed there, first as lady's-maid and then as housekeeper, till her hair was grey ; stayed there till her

mistress died, and her son first married, and then died also. When that event occurred, Miss Glendy gave and received notice to quit—the letters of dismissal and resignation crossing each other—and retired with her savings to spend the remainder of her days with a niece, the sad widow of a dissenting minister.

Before her mistress died, however, Miss Glendy urged many of her own relations to come south and taste of the rich sweetness of English pastures. And they came—some to do well, and some to do ill; some to tire of the pleasant land, and seek further change in distant countries; some to die; some to marry. Amongst the latter were two girls—one, Bessie, who married a small farmer named Sanson, and another, Jean, who, being of a serious, not to say discontented, turn of mind, attracted the attention of a

Methodist preacher, who ultimately asked her to become his wife.

Of the men, we need concern ourselves only with Hal Glendy, son of Miss Glendy's favourite brother, who, having settled in the north of Ireland, refused to leave his adopted home, but eventually sent his firstborn to Abbotsleigh as deputy, and bade him look after his aunt's savings, which the youth failed to do, though he came of Irish folk on the one side, and of Scotch on the other.

Nevertheless, he prospered. He had the best work in all that part of the country. The gentry liked him, and he did remarkably well both for himself and those belonging to him. He it was who first made any stir about his pretty cousin Lucy living at the Hall. Perhaps he knew that of the new Squire recently come into his estate which made him

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think the young woman might find a better service elsewhere. Perhaps jealousy quickened his perceptions. Be all this as it may, he did not approve of Lucy remaining at the Hall after Mrs. Barthorne's death; and he told his aunt this, and his aunt bade him show his face again in any house where she lived at his peril.

For Miss Glendy had as high a notion of the pride of station in men as she had of the power of virtue in women. For no earthly consideration would Miss Glendy, even in her most youthful days, have permitted herself to be chucked under the chin, or kissed, or even complimented, and if she did not credit the whole of her sex with a like circumspectness, at all events she considered no child of a Glendy would ever suffer any undue familiarity. And supposing—even sup-

posing any Glendy capable of so far forgetting her genealogy and her training, she felt quite certain the son of her dead lady was too true a gentleman ever to speak familiarly to a servant.

At her approach Squire Miles had always shrunk away appalled. He called her, in his juvenile days, "Old Whale-bones;" but then, who dare have repeated this utterance to Miss Glendy? And when he grew older, weak and foolish as the man was, he had sense enough to understand it would be well to retain so discreet a housekeeper in his service; and, accordingly, no duchess ever received higher honour than did Miss Glendy from the young heir. She would as soon have thought—this is unquestionably true—of Mr. Miles making love to her as of his making love to her niece.

But he did make love to pretty Lucy

Sanson, nevertheless; and, as has been said before, there is not the slightest doubt he would have gone further, and made her mistress of the Hall, had she been wise as she was fair.

When it all came to the knowledge of her friends—as it had to do before the birth of Miles—the dissenting minister took her home, and Miss Glendy wished to resign her situation, but Mr. Barthorne was penitent, and declared his intention of marrying their niece.

Perhaps he might have done so even then, had Lucy proved true to herself and her relatives; but she failed in her part; and one day—sick to death, probably, of the monotony of her uncle's house; weary of his homilies, and unable longer to endure the uncertainty of her position—she yielded to her lover's persuasions, and slipped quietly away with him to France,

leaving uncle, aunt, and child to brave popular opinion as they might.

Mr. Mason, being a thorough Christian and a truly moral man, took her defection seriously to heart—indeed, people said he never recovered the shock of finding upon what empty air he had spent his exhortations. Miss Glendy, equally moral, bore herself with more equanimity.

“Something must be done for the child,” she said; so she had him brought to the Hall, hired a nurse for him, and treated Miles in all respects as though he had been born in lawful wedlock, and was next rightful heir to Abbotsleigh Hall.

There Lucy never returned. She and the Squire passed two years travelling about from city to city, at the end of which time she died at a little roadside inn, after giving birth to a dead child—her second—a girl.

The Squire did not immediately retrace his steps to England. He visited the Holy Land; he spent some time in Norway; he travelled through Spain, and when he finally recrossed the threshold of the paternal mansion, Miles—little Miles—was a sturdy, handsome lad of six, able to read very well indeed, and still better able to ride.

He was introduced cautiously to the Squire, who first tolerated his presence, and then took notice of him.

“He will make the child his heir,” Miss Glendy decided, and her heart beat high at the thought.

But the Squire made no sign of such adoption; with the boy as with the mother, he drifted. He did not send the child away, neither did he arrange for his proper training.

Almost out of pity—and perhaps with

an eye to possible benefits in the future—the rector of Abbotsleigh saw to his education. The boy was clever. Any father might have been proud of such a son; and it is quite possible the Squire would in time have taken to the lad, and left him the lands of Abbotsleigh, which were quite free and unentailed, had it not so fell out that at the house of a relative—of his nearest male relative, indeed—he met with one of those women whom the younger Miles abhorred afterwards with all his soul—soft, stealing, plausible, cunning—a mere nursery governess in the eyes of Mrs. John Barthorne; the loveliest, and the sweetest, and the gentlest creature God had ever made, in the opinion of Squire Miles.

This creature, lovely, sweet, and gentle, understood her admirer's nature much better than poor Lucy had done. She

fell no victim. This time the Squire was lotted off and bought in at a very low price indeed. Miles Barthorne, Esquire, of Abbotsleigh Hall, married the governess in his cousin's family, and took her abroad as he had taken Lucy.

History repeats itself. There is a wonderful sameness in the record of most human lives. There was a wonderful sameness in the life of Miles Barthorne, only this time it was he who died abroad. He died very suddenly at Florence—so suddenly that he could not make his will, long deferred, or do anything save, when almost in the death struggle, entreat his wife to “see to the boy.”

Squire Miles was thought worthy of Christian burial in Protestant England; so his remains, not having been wrecked by the way, were brought to Abbotsleigh, where his dust was laid with the dust of

his fathers, and where Mr. John Barthorne followed as chief mourner.

Miles, junior, aged fourteen, was nowhere. He had been brought up—Mrs. Barthorne number two being childless—as the heir; unacknowledged, perhaps, but still certainly; and now he could not even attend the funeral. The man who had wrought the sin was dead, and none might repair his error.

When Miss Glendy knew there was no will, she tendered her resignation, which Mrs. Barthorne had anticipated by a letter of her own.

No more education for Miles—no more ponies—no more Latin and Greek.

“Cast out the son of the bondwoman,” was Mrs. Barthorne’s dictum; and, coincident with her return, Miles was cast out neck and crop from the pleasant lands of Abbotsleigh.

For her life Mrs. Barthorne had the house of Abbotsleigh and five hundred a year—everything else went to Mr. John Barthorne. To him, not unsuccessfully, an appeal was made for the illegitimate child. The applicant, Hal Glendy, who went over to state the case, received a cheque for fifty pounds, and some useful advice anent bringing the boy up to an honest calling.

Next day he had a long talk with his nephew, told him in plain English his position, and asked would he learn a trade—would he learn all he could teach him? The boy slept upon the proposition, and said—yes; he liked his uncle, and he did not like his Aunt Glendy. So his uncle bound him apprentice, but not under the name of Barthorne.

To Hal Glendy the cognomen was odious. “You are my nephew, Mick

Sanson, now," he said, and Miles assented, for he was yet young, and the bile in his nature had not begun to stir.

For which reason, far and near, the boy, as he grew older and the story of his birth became more remote, was known as "Black Mick."

So far as anybody could tell, he had no name of his own—neither Barthorne nor Sanson. He was simply Glendy's nephew, or Black Mick.

Curiously enough, whenever any pity chanced to be expressed for the youth, it was certain to be by some of the gentry in the neighbourhood, who thought Miles' a hard case, and considered the widow and Mr. John Barthorne might between them have devised some scheme for bringing up the son of the dead man to a profession.

They had seen the child riding about

on his rough pony, when the sturdy, handsome boy stood a very fair chance of being left all his father's possessions, and they did not consider that merely because Squire Miles died without a will, Miles, junior, should have been put to work at the forge.

For this reason, when business took these gentlemen to Glendy's yard, they had always a kindly word and pleasant look for the smith's nephew; and when he went to work at any of the large houses in the neighbourhood of his old home, the ladies went a little out of their way to speak civilly to the youth who had been treated, as they considered, so harshly by Mr. Barthorne.

Indeed, to speak truly, the memory of that very frail young woman, Lucy Sanson, was much less displeasing to them than the presence of Mrs. Barthorne.

Lucy, at all events, had not been sufficiently artful to induce the Squire to marry her, and this woman, not a bit better born probably, and certainly not possessed of a tenth part of Lucy's beauty, had insisted on church, and clergy, and ring, and proper settlements like any countess.

Of course the ladies of Spindlethorpe and Abbotsleigh, and the other neighbourhoods adjacent thereto, never reduced their real feelings into such exceedingly plain language as the above, and consequently they found Miles a convenient peg on which to hang their dislike of the Squire's widow.

"She might have had some pity for the boy," they declared, which she certainly might, though it by no means follows that those who were warmest in expressing their opinions would have acted a more Christian part themselves.

"We find it so easy to tell other people how they ought to act," as the rector who had educated Miles, and who had privately remonstrated with Mrs. Barthorne concerning her treatment of the boy, silyly remarked when public opinion set, as it did at frequent intervals, very strongly against the widow.

As Miles grew to manhood, the gentry were more than ever decided that it was a scandal to see the young man shoeing horses, and going about the country carrying a basket of tools; and they felt quite satisfied in their own minds that Mrs. Barthorne must feel thoroughly ashamed of herself when she met her stepson.

It is extremely improbable she did anything of the sort; but the sight of Miles became in course of time a source of serious annoyance to her.

When she cast out the boy she forgot that, in the ordinary course of things, he would grow to be a man, and it was not pleasant for her to be stared at and elbowed by a stalwart young fellow who was the very image of her late husband, and who lost no opportunity of thrusting himself in her way.

Spite of the remonstrances of his friend the rector, he made a point of attending Abbotsleigh Church, and he attended it to such purpose that Mrs. Barthorne's pew became finally tenantless. She tried speaking to the young man, and said to him in the church porch—

“How do you do, Miles?”

For answer he folded his arms and stared her out of countenance.

About Abbotsleigh the people ceased touching their hats to her, and she had to send fifteen miles if she wanted a lock

repaired or a horse shod ; for Hal Glendy would permit no man in his employ to work at the Hall.

Each month which added to Miles' age made the neighbourhood less tolerable to Mrs. Barthorne.

Out of pure insolence the young fellow had commenced his system of persecution, but eventually he pursued it with an object.

"I will drive her out of the neighbourhood," he said to his uncle.

"Better let her alone and stick to your work," was the answer.

"I do stick to my work," replied Miles, "but I will not let her alone."

And the upshot of it all was that Mrs. Barthorne eventually, finding that the state of her health necessitated change of air, let the Hall, and departed bag and baggage, to revisit Abbotsleigh no more.

From the time of her departure public

interest in the late Squire's son began to abate. There was not the slightest chance of his ever being anything better than a blacksmith now. The Squire could not rise from his grave. John Barthorne had a large family of his own; and really fifty pounds was not an illiberal gift, when the circumstances were reconsidered. The Hall was let to strangers, who had never heard of the Barthorne scandal; and Glendy was willing enough to allow the horses belonging to the new-comers to be shod in his yard, and to send over and execute any work in his line which the incoming tenants wished to intrust to him.

Glendy had a very good business indeed, the gentry said. He was making money fast and investing it prudently. No doubt young Sanson would be his heir. He was unmarried, and had no

nearer relative. Further, Miss Glendy had amassed no contemptible amount of savings during her residence at the Hall.

Miles therefore stood a very fair chance of becoming hereafter a well-to-do master smith. It had been a good thing his learning a trade—better, perhaps, than if Mr. John Barthorne had educated and sent him to college.

Hal Glendy was a far more prosperous man than many who considered themselves his social superiors. Altogether, the thorn of Mrs. Barthorne's presence being removed from the flesh of the good people round and about Abbotsleigh, society began to make itself comfortable about the young man Miles.

After all, the story was a very old one, and the boy had fared much better than might have been expected: and it was time the whole affair was forgotten—in

which opinion Hal Glendy most heartily coincided.

As for Miles, no one asked what he thought of his position. No one dreamed of the wild aspirations that had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength.

He meant to make money, and buy the Hall and land immediately adjoining, if he could do no more. For him the face of woman had no charm. There was only one thing on earth he desired, and that thing was sufficient wealth to enable him to take back his name and become Squire Barthorne of the Hall.

His uncle's business was increasing steadily and rapidly. It would not be hard to make a fortune out of their trade, Miles decided.

Visions of a foundry had often crossed his mind. Mentally he had built ranges

and ranges of workshops, and heard the chink of a hundred hammers. He with his education, which he had never forgotten, his uncle with his keen shrewdness—an integral part of his nature—between them could they not rear a trade? Could they not make their hundreds thousands, and their thousands tens of thousands, as other men, no cleverer, no wiser, no more industrious, had done before?

And thus, while working at his trade, he built his air castles.

When he had got it perfect—ay, even to the cloud-capped pinnacles—it was swept in a moment away. The work of all his young life had to be begun over again.

He had mistaken the foundation on which he built; and it was necessary to reconstruct the whole edifice, and go on

labouring, labouring through the years till the turrets of his fresh palace should touch cloud-land again.

For five and twenty years Hal Glendy had remained faithful to the memory of his first love, Lucy Sanson. At the end of that quarter of a century, he met a very young woman who had no objection to become an old man's darling, and married her.

Miles thought this hard on him ; and perhaps it was ; but a harder trial was in store.

With an intuition by no means rare in her sex, Mrs. Glendy took it into her pretty head that she did not like her husband's nephew, which was all the more singular, since women generally admired his handsome face.

But Mrs. Glendy's instinct told her this man would prove an enemy ; and she

gave her husband no rest till he intimated to Miles it was best they should part company.

He did not do this ungenerously, however. He gave Miles the fifty pounds handed to him by Mr. John Barthorne, with the interest at five per cent. for ten years added. Further, he gave him twenty-five pounds and a watch and chain as a present from himself, together with the written recommendation already mentioned—and not without tears, for the lad had been very dear to him, and the mother dearer—and a dead love, like a dead sorrow, can never be quite forgotten—he bade Miles Barthorne good-bye and godspeed.

Miles had insisted on being styled Barthorne in his uncle's letter of advice to all whom the character of his nephew might concern.

“For a woman my father left me a beggar,” observed Mr. Miles Barthorne bitterly, and quite truly. “And for a woman you send me adrift to make for whatever land I can. I will enter that land in my own name. I have been known by one of your choosing long enough.”

“See that you bring disgrace on neither,” said his uncle sadly.

“Even in that case I am not likely to trouble you again,” the young man answered; and so left Spindlethorpe.

CHAPTER IV.

MILES BARTHORNE MARRIES IN HASTE.

For three years Miles Barthorne continued shoeing horses—increasing his staff of men and extending his business. At the end of that time he sold his plant, premises, and connection, and retired from the smithing trade and Tottenham to a small cottage situate at West Green which he had bought for an old song.

The public mind at Tottenham was much exercised to account for this proceeding. Fortunes were in those days made at Tottenham. The resident gentry in the neighbourhood patronized the local

tradespeople, and did not rush to London for their supplies, as is in all neighbourhoods too much the case at present ; and the butcher and the grocer, the baker and the candlestick maker, were by consequence well-to-do and substantial householders and house-proprietors. Further, the resident gentry were wealthy. No stable but held its pair of carriage horses, whilst there were many stables that held many more ; and as the new smith invented a new system of doing business which found great favour in the eyes of those who had been perpetually harassed by the ever-recurring remark, "If you please, sir, the bay horse must be shod," or "John has just taken the chestnut mare to the forge," uttered at the precise instant when the bay horse or the chestnut mare was most urgently wanted, he had at the time when he sold his "going

concern " the pick and choice of the best work in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Barthorne it was who originated the contract system of shoeing horses. He roughed and shod for so much a head per annum, sent his own men for the animals, and sent his own men back with them. For an additional annual sum he saw to their general health, and would have engaged to feed them likewise had he for a moment supposed the oats supplied would ever have found the way to their mangers.

There are things a man cannot effect ; and one is commanding the honesty of any human being who has to do with horses. At that point Barthorne drew the line. He shod and he physicked, there he stopped. Being, after his fashion, a representative man, it is not a matter for wonder that amongst all ranks and by

all classes his relinquishment of a paying business was freely canvassed. Fat Quakers remarked to their demure wives "that it was very strange, but doubtless friend Miles knew his own affairs best." Irritable gentlemen not of the Quaker persuasion wondered "what the —— Barthorne could be thinking of," whilst in bar-parlours wiseacres said "there was no dependence to be placed on strangers;" and their wives running in next door to gossip, declared "Master Barthorne had never been the same since he married."

For he had married, six months previous to the time when he sold his business, a quiet-looking, pale-faced, grey-eyed young woman, possessed of a pretty graceful figure, light brown hair, two dimples, and a mouth exactly like a cat's. She managed this feature remarkably well, but still it conferred upon her a

peculiarity of appearance for which most persons were puzzled to account. With all she was not a bad-looking person. She was pre-eminently that which in a certain rank is known as "genteel-looking," the accent being laid strongly on the "gen." She dressed well, walked well, spoke well, and was by the neighbourhood generally considered "above her station."

Miles chanced to see her at the house of one of his patrons, where, being a poor though publicly acknowledged relation of the mistress of the establishment, she filled the position of nursery governess. And a wretched life she led while in that position; so wretched that, although Barthorne was, in her estimation, "only a blacksmith," and after a fashion she considered herself a "lady," she accepted his advances without disdain and

thankfully agreed to become his wife, which he made her despite his former resolve of remaining single till he could marry to advance his interests.

To resolve, however, is one thing—to perform, another. Practically Miles Barthorne found his single estate a drawback to his worldly prosperity; not merely, being young and good-looking, did it compel him to have his domestic affairs managed by hags who were neither pleasing to look at nor desirable in their habits, but he found that ladies discovered he proved a bone of contention and a fertile source of idleness amongst their female servants.

He was not the man to encourage smiles and covert glances from cooks or housemaids, but his studied reserve inflamed the hearts of all the fair creatures who came in contact with him, and it is

not too much to say he might have had his choice of at least a hundred personable women, some of them possessed of a not contemptible amount of money in the savings bank.

Now, Barthorne did not like being made love to. Had his lot been cast in a higher circle, he would have fallen a prey to no match-making mother, to no young beauty eager for a settlement.

In all ranks there are a few men to be found utterly insensible to flattery, who read a woman through and through as they might a book, and who can tell as accurately what she is worth as a judicious buyer can the probable value of a field of standing wheat.

This man Barthorne, who plays a prominent part in the story I have to tell, was probably as great a scoundrel as any one could, in the length of a midsummer

day, meet in the streets of London, but his wickedness did not take the form of an undue love of women. Rather, as has been indicated, his nature was unredeemed by any love for any woman. He had his ideal, possibly, but so far his and her paths had not crossed. Given him his ideal, it is quite possible he might have developed higher qualities, for not unfrequently the worse a man the greater his veneration for a woman, pure, gentle, gracious, beautiful.

As from the bottom of a well one can see the stars in daylight, so from the depth of a man's wickedness he can discern the beauty of virtue when possessed by a woman.

It was, therefore, from no particular love of Miss Lucy Chappell that he asked her to marry him. He wanted a wife, and just then she was the only person

likely to suit in that capacity who presented herself. On the other hand, it is fair to say that, so far as she was capable of caring for anything, Miss Lucy did care for the handsome and audacious smith. Of course, being a properly constituted young woman, had any person of a like appearance in a higher rank appeared and proposed, Miss Lucy would have accepted him; but no more eligible suitor crossing the stage, she conceived a very sufficient affection for him, which, as years went on, developed into jealousy of every woman he looked at.

It is quite possible, however, that Miles, placed as he then was, might have hesitated before asking her to marry him, had he not chanced, while waiting for the master of the house in order to explain a disputed item in the quarterly account, to hear Lucy's mistress engaged in giving

that young person a "tongue-thrashing," as the lower orders graphically style that merciless lecture some women are so well able to inflict. In the course of this verbal chastisement his own name was mentioned more than once, the mistress declaring she would not have her house disgraced by the governess of her children speaking familiarly to a tradesman, to a person who she believed shod horses himself.

To this Lucy answered deprecatingly, she had never spoken to Mr. Barthorne at all except to say "Good morning" or "Good afternoon," which remark only added fuel to the flame, and started the indignant lady off on another furious canter, beginning with the words :

"*Mr. Barthorne*, indeed ! What next, I wonder !"

"I will marry that girl," said Barthorne to himself ; and he did.

For the time being he gave up shoeing horses, and walked about every day in the glory of his Sunday garments, in which he did not look uncomfortable, as is the manner of his class, but as Miss Chappell mentally observed, "quite like a gentleman."

First he threw himself across her path when she was walking out with the children; but ere long he persuaded her to meet him in the pleasant, quiet lanes round and about Edmonton, or in the still more lonely field-paths which are so numerous in the country lying to the north of London.

It ought to have been a happy wooing, according to the old proverb, for it was a very speedy one. Within three months of the time when Barthorne heard his patron's wife finding fault with her governess for having spoken civilly to him,

he was married to her in Tottenham Old Church, Lucy's only brother acting the part of father.

After the ceremony Mrs. Barthorne, who was not deficient in courage, returned to the house of her employer, broke the news of her change of state, said she hoped the step she had taken would cause no "ill will," remarked that she should send for her boxes, which were already packed, stated that "Mr. Barthorne and she intended to spend their honeymoon at the Isle of Wight," and finally, having stricken her relative almost dumb with indignation, left the place all colours flying.

Within ten minutes after her departure a messenger was despatched to Barthorne, requesting that his bill might be at once sent in—his bill up to that date. Barthorne laughed, and returned it by the

man ; but nothing further came of the matter. On his return home, the owner of the establishment did not find it convenient to send a cheque for the amount ; and accordingly things drifted on as usual, and Barthorne's men still continued to shoe and dose the horses of Mrs. Barthorne's kinswoman's husband until Barthorne sold his business, and gave rise to those remarks and conjectures to which reference has already been made.

The mind of Tottenham, then, was exercised concerning Miles Barthorne. Tottenham could not understand why he should sell his business. Tottenham failed entirely to comprehend why he or any one found the air of West Green better suited to his taste than the air of Tottenham. Finally, Tottenham, which considered it had made the stranger, felt disgusted at his desertion of it.

And yet the secret was really a very simple one. For three years Miles Barthorne had tried whether it was possible to make a fortune out of a farrier's business; at the end of that time he decided his fortune could never be made out of it in Tottenham.

He was young, and when men are young they think they have not a moment to lose; when men are old they think, conversely, and fortunately, that time will wait for their lagging feet. Further, the dead, certain level of his existence seemed killing him; and beyond all, he had, one winter's day, in crossing the field-path leading from West Green to White Hart Lane, slipped in getting over one of the stiles, which were made purposely quite as inconvenient then as they are made inconvenient now, and strained himself severely, so severely,

indeed, that he finally understood a long time must elapse before he could do a heavy day's work at "the fire," or be in any respect the strong man who had halted at Tottenham *en route* to London.

Further, he made the discovery all persons who have to do with labour make sooner or later, viz., that while it is possible to make a large amount, comparatively, of profit out of a couple of workmen, and a very fair percentage out of a large amount of capital when a vast number of hands are employed, a medium trade—a lower middle-class sort of factory—always must prove eminently unsatisfactory to an ambitious employer.

His connection had spread, and was spreading; but when Barthorne came to count his gains, he found the result utterly disproportionate to the risk and the anxiety. Bad debts he had not many;

but of bad workmen he had a surfeit—men who, the moment his back was turned, lit their pipes and sent out for beer, and shod the horses badly, and confided their return to some boy, who galloped them along the highway as if running a race with John Gilpin. And, lastly, he hated being a master-smith; he loathed the sort of position it conferred. As a workman, people had regarded him as an anomaly; as a farrier employing labour, they were disposed to consider he occupied his proper sphere.

“I would rather work hard at contracts, with one or two men under me, than go on with this sort of thing,” he remarked to his wife; and she, though secretly mortified, dared offer no opposition to his whim.

She had indeed looked forward to a phaeton, in which he should drive round

and take his orders and collect his accounts, she, dressed in all her best, sitting by his side ; she had dreamt of her husband abandoning work altogether, leaving that to his men, to the end that his hand might become nearly as white and soft as her own ; she had seen visions of annual visits to the seaside, where, in a black satin gown and gold chain, well spread out over a silk velvet mantle, she should ruffle it with her betters, as she had done on that memorable journey to the Isle of Wight. And now, as she once observed to her husband, “ it turned out she had married a man determined to be no better than a common labourer.”

“ But still who will give you more luxuries than any clerk at his thirty shillings in the City,” replied Barthorne ; “ and if you behave yourself, and be a good girl, and do as you are told, you

shall be a lady some day, you shall, by —— ! ”

For Mr. Barthorne, unconventional though he might be, had already imbibed the London idea that a lady is a person who dresses every day in purple and fine linen, who employs her elegant leisure in doing nothing, who drives out in a handsome carriage, drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses, and whom it is competent for the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange to unmake, as, generally speaking, the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange have made her.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLAINS A LITTLE DIFFICULTY.

ABOUT thirteen years after Miles Barthorne's entry into Tottenham, and ten after he disposed of his business and retired to his small cottage at West Green, the ruling minds which held watch and ward over the well-being of the Mint were much exercised to discover that a new species of illicit coining was, and had been for a considerable period, going on. The peculiarity of the spurious money was that it all appeared to be made of perfectly good metal; and it so

admirably counterfeited the productions of the Mint that no one except an expert could have detected the fraud.

That this coinage did not emanate from any ordinary gang of forgers, was well known to the authorities; but the authorities would have been much better pleased could they for a moment have supposed such a thing possible, as the chances of detecting the criminals might then have been much greater.

Over and over again the powers that then were discussed the question as to who the person could be that found such a course of crime remunerative. First, the Jews were suspected; a theory was put forward that some "fence," belonging to one either of the known or lost tribes, had discovered it would be more remunerative to deal with stolen goods in the form of crown pieces and sovereigns than in

the shape of melted tankards and irreco-
gnizable teapots; and till this theory had
been thoroughly discussed and exhausted
it seemed plausible enough. There could
be no doubt but that tankards would find
a more ready circulation in the guise of
lawful coin of the realm than of stolen
goods; there could equally be no question
that whatever wickedness it was in the
power of man to do in order to make
money, some unscrupulous Jew might
safely be trusted to think of. Besides,
what Christian could know so well as a
Jew where to lay his hand on the men
and the machinery necessary to carry out
such a purpose? "A person would
require, in the first instance," so argued
those who believed in a larger amount
of original sin having come out of the
Garden of Eden for the benefit of the
Jews than that entailed upon the Chris-

tians, "a cheap stock of gold and silver, and a knowledge where to replace such stock is needed. Now, all that is A B C to those descendants of the tribes who receive stolen metals; in the next place, it would be necessary to give these metals into the hands of a chemist able to make them pure, as we find these crowns and sovereigns to be. Now, who so likely to find such a chemist amongst his brethren as a Jew? When all that is effected, he must provide a secret place for transmuting the precious metals into coin. Who would have better facilities for finding such room or building as a Jew? And last, but not least, who could more readily find some poor wretch, probably in his power, able to supply the requisite moulds, which we all see must have been made by an expert at his trade. The manipulation is a mere

bagatelle. If men are, for the sake of a very poor living, willing to run the risk of manufacturing and issuing base coin, men could easily be found to make genuine coin with the distribution of which it is evident, as we know the bulk of this money comes from abroad, the makers are not intrusted."

Now, there was a certain plausibility about this theory, and the way in which its parent presented it to his friends in council: and as one theory is good till another is told, this was held to be the true explanation of the case until another gentleman adopted the wise course of undertaking to refute his friend's notion without attempting to advance one of his own.

"It is neat," he said, "but it won't hold water. Bring experience to bear on the subject, and what do we find?

Why, that a Jew never cares to bring a number of capable instruments together to do his work. He may have a hundred people doing his bidding, but he never engages them in any undertaking where they could combine together and pitch him over. Here you have at least half a dozen interests cognizant of each other, and yet employed to benefit one man, and that man a "fence." Besides, it is agreed on all hands that this money is pure. Believe me, the Jew doesn't exist who in such a case could refrain from putting base metal with the pure. It is a simple impossibility. Clever as your friends are, my dear sir, believe me that sovereign"—and the speaker rang one on the table—"emanated from the brain of no Hebrew. A German might claim the credit of it—if we can suppose a German possessed of sufficient capital

willing to run the risk. I cannot suppose it, however, and I am therefore at sea."

After that, official opinion ran up and down the gamut, now inclined to attribute the coinage to some gigantic conspiracy, and again willing to suppose it originated with some clever tenant who, having unearthed a mass of buried treasure, wished to conceal his discovery from the lord of the manor.

Though an annoying, it was a simple matter, after all. For obvious reasons, it never could be extended indefinitely. A man who could sell gold in bulk honestly would never think of troubling himself to convert the metal into sovereigns. It was an extremely easy matter for the Mint to re-melt the coins and send them out again with the stamp of authority on them. A few thousand sovereigns per annum increased the yearly loss by a

sum too trifling to mention. Nevertheless, the authorities governing the Mint did not like the circumstance, and, lest the practice should spread, made little stir about the matter.

A few confidential detectives were instructed that such coinage was in circulation, and the detectives really tried their best to discover what villain it might be who was sending into the market genuine silver and gold. Smashers had good terms offered to them if they would turn informers, which, in good truth, they would have been only too glad to do had the secret lain with them. But, one and all, they were in the same story. They had no story to tell. They knew of no one who possessed hidden stores of the precious metals. They were only acquainted with men who cut their dies pretty well, but not so well as those

exhibited to them. They could not say whether there was in London a "master smasher" able to employ skilled labour and supply men like themselves with moulds and materials. They had never heard of him, at all events. With a shrug, and a wink, and a significant thumb over the left shoulder, they thought if there was such a one he "would not find it pay—no, not at all."

Nevertheless, the detectives persevered. They kept their eyes on Whitechapel, and bestowed fond glances on Clerkenwell and the environs of Gray's Inn Lane. They travelled down East as far as Bromley, and they went West to Marylebone. They did not omit to investigate suspicious localities round Lambeth, and they extended their search far down the Old Kent Road. For a long period one most respectable but eccentric house-

holder residing near Ball's Pond Gate unconsciously received an extraordinary amount of attention from one of the force; whilst a widow at Homerton and a bachelor at Hackney were about the same period subjected to a strict system of espionage under the impression that one made the bullets while the other fired them.

And all the time the real culprits were upon the most friendly terms with the police of their respective districts; for no human being could have imagined that Walter Chappell, head manager to Nelson Brothers, of Soho, on the one part, and Miles Barthorne, plumber, gasfitter, locksmith, and contractor for general repairs, on the other hand, between them devised and agreed to carry on this precious scheme.

And yet such was the fact. In a

modest little cottage at West Green, all overgrown with creepers, in the garden of which during the summer months Miles Barthorne might, evening after evening, have been seen watering his roses, and tying up his carnations, and hoeing amongst flower-beds—these deeds of coining were done. The man who had for so long a time persistently wooed fortune now seemed on the point of winning her. Honestly he had tried at first to gain her smiles; dishonestly he finally decided she was alone to be possessed.

Still young, he might hope to compass all his fancy had pictured as desirable. If not Squire Barthorne of Abbotsleigh, he might yet be Squire Barthorne of a fairer domain. Other men as unscrupulous—more unscrupulous than he—made fortunes, bought properties, retired

from trade, married their daughters, sent their sons to the universities, and became magistrates, members of Parliament, and deputy lieutenants.

All this he intended to do, with the exception of sending out his sons, for he had none. His family consisted of only one daughter, a large-eyed, sallow-skinned, dark-haired, precocious girl, in whose features her mother failed to trace the promise of future beauty; while her father—a better judge of such matters—declared she would be the image of that naughty Molly Barthorne so celebrated in Court annals, who in the palmy days of Abbotsleigh caused nobles to sigh, and write inane verses in praise of madam's dimples; whilst great ladies wept—not without reason, perhaps—over her graces of person and her lack of virtue.

Following the family traditions, this

child had, much against Mrs. Barthorne's wish, been called Mabella—not a bad name, perhaps, for a child in any rank, since so easy to speak in full, and so much more easy to shorten into Mab.

Since, however, neither father nor mother elected to shorten it at all, the child's name gave great offence to those who had the privilege of being neighbours to the Barthornes; though whether the Barthornes could have called their daughter by any name capable of satisfying the West Greenians may well be doubted.

“Drat them Barthornes, says I,” remarked a voluble matron about the period indicated at the beginning of this chapter, “making such a goddess of that yellow-faced thing all eyes and hair, with her double rat-tats at the door, and her ‘pa’ and her ‘ma,’ as if they were all gentle-

folks together. And, then, missis in her grey silk gownd on Sundays, and grey bonnet trimmed with pink and a white feather, if you please ; and her poor man going off every morning to his work just as regular as my Bill. But, if you think of it, he's every bit as bad as she, giving his five shillings to this and his half a crown to that, just, as my Bill says, to get the blind side of the clergy and such like. And no doubt he finds it all to his account ; for they don't owe a farden to nobody—not a farden, if you believe me. But, for my part, I hate such ways. And Bill says, for all Miles Barthorne was a master smith, and sold his business—no one knows why—and does live in his own house, and holds his head so high, it will all come home to him some day ; for such lofty and mighty airs ain't suitable to the likes of us." From which it will

be seen that Miles Barthorne was not popular; and, indeed, had he been endowed with all the qualities which, in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, St. Paul so eloquently enumerates, with charity at the back of them, he could not have pleased West Green.

West Green did not like strangers, and he was a stranger. West Green liked people it could understand, and it could not understand Miles Barthorne. West Green liked people who were not above taking a friendly glass at the bar of the Black Boy, and Barthorne never drank with any one at any bar, and had his beer in by the cask, "like a gentleman."

Further, in a vain endeavour to curry favour with people who detested him because he was prosperous, he had been weak enough to lend here half a sovereign, and there a couple of pounds, to

keep the wolf hunger, or that worse wolf the bailiff, out of his neighbours' houses; and the result proved precisely what might have been expected. When he demurred about the second half sovereign, and refused the next two pounds, the would-be borrowers, who had never repaid the original loans, mentally stigmatized him as a close-fisted curmudgeon, or as a time-serving hypocrite, as the mood was on them.

There were many who, like Bill's wife, said "it would come home to him." Nevertheless, when the vague "it" did come home, these were the first to remember his good works. At that period, however, Barthorne was not in a position to know much about their compassion or to extract any comfort from it had he been aware the human being existed who pitied him.

When the good people of West Green came to speak with bated breath of his known virtues and his supposed vices, the object of so much animadversion was lying in gaol upon a somewhat serious charge. Not that of coining, be it remarked. No one in authority ever, except vaguely, imagined Barthorne had anything to do with that little business. If other secrets leaked out, the secret of the good money was preserved almost intact. Into that which eventually proved his stumbling-block Miles Barthorne drifted quite by accident. Great crimes, I apprehend, usually originate in very small beginnings, and the beginning of Barthorne's wickedness was as small as can well be imagined.

When Miss Mabel was about four years of age her Uncle Walter, who always made much of the child, promised to give

her a medal, and to let her see him make it.

Barthorne had about that time taken in exchange from one of his customers a considerable amount of copper, and out of this copper Walter Chappell moulded missy's ornament. He bored a hole in it, and hung it, suspended by a ribbon, about the child's neck.

After she had gone to bed and fallen asleep, the medal still clasped in her little hands, Miles asked his brother-in-law how he made that thing he gave Mabel.

"Out of your copper," answered the other. "I hope you are not angry. The value of the thing is not more than two-pence."

"Oh, I am not angry, of course. Use as much of it as you like, only I felt curious, that was all."

That was not all, as subsequent events

proved. Barthorne turned the matter over in his active mind. He thought about it while walking to and from his work. He thought about it when directing the two men he employed. He lay awake at night, and considered the question in all its bearings, and finally, when missy had so long outlived her fourth birthday as to be nearer her fifth, when the medal had long been lost and replaced by one of those superb watches which in those days were sold for a shilling, and in these can be bought, with the addition of a guard chain, for a penny, Miles opened his mind to his brother-in-law.

The young man had about this period managed to get into two scrapes—one concerning a horse which did not win as he had expected, and another about a girl upon whose character, like that of the horse, he chanced to place too much

dependence. In each case money was needful to extricate him from his difficulty, and in the extremity he made use of funds belonging to his employers. When another horse happened to be "nowhere," and it became absolutely necessary to replace the sum abstracted, Chappell was forced to confide in his sister's husband, and ask his assistance to save him from disgrace and ruin; and this assistance Barthorne gave willingly enough, tagging on to his favour, however, the stipulation that the younger man should lend his skill as a die-sinker to enable Barthorne to make both their fortunes.

The downward path is one easy enough to travel at the outset; and so Chappell discovered. Ere long he not merely gave his skill, but gave it eagerly. He liked the money Barthorne freely handed to

him ; he liked the excitement this illegitimate trade produced in his life. He did not pause to ask where Barthorne procured his materials. He did not inquire how the money was coined or who disposed of it. And, in truth, in the earlier stages of the business any questions of this sort would have elicited little information, for Barthorne then was merely experimenting, considering his plans, and developing his resources, placing his men for the battle, and considering the possible cost of defeat, the probable gains of victory.

When the fight against law began in earnest, Chappell was too deeply in debt, and too completely involved in the plot ever to dream of drawing back if he had wished to do so. But, as has been said, he did not wish anything of the kind. He believed two men never engaged in a

safer speculation, or one more certain of carrying them ultimately to the pinnacle of prosperity.

“We shall be able to do better yet, my boy,” said Barthorne, slapping him on the back. “When I can perfect the milling-machine, and find out how to separate the alloy by some quicker and simpler method, we may consider ourselves made men.”

Nevertheless, the shortest road to success generally takes years to travel. The milling-machine never was made quite perfect, and the separation of the alloy proved a matter of time, during the course of which many difficulties had to be encountered and overcome; and accordingly it came to pass that missy, for whose special benefit the original copper medal had been struck, was eight years of age before her Uncle Walter and her

Papa Miles had got their machinery well at work.

By the time, however, that the company was in full swing that little cottage at West Green was turning out illicit coin at the rate of some thousands a year; but Barthorne never ceased working at his trade, while Chappell, promoted to a salary of three pounds a week, acted as manager to the firm with whom he had been apprenticed, and the employers of both would, if put upon oath, have sworn to the pair being most respectable men, which no doubt they would have been had temptation not chanced to cross their path. As matters stood, they were very far indeed from being respectable; but this only proves how very cautious people ought to be about vouching for the good character of any one. Which perhaps is the reason why people like to speak so ill

of their neighbours, since there are those who hold the semblance of sincerity to be a more Christian virtue than the reality of charity.

This is beside the story I have undertaken to tell. Miles Barthorne, whatever his other faults, was held by those who came in contact with him to be a respectable, well-to-do, clever, honest man. He had played and he was playing his double game with admirable coolness, courage, and address ; and it is probable that he might have gone on playing it successfully for years, or till he chose to retire from business with an ample fortune, but for one of those unfortunate accidents which occasionally upset the worldly vehicle in which the wisest and best of our celebrated criminals are travelling post to success.

The accident which happened to Miles

Barthorne was, though a remote, a very awkward one. A man took it into his head to die—what was worse, he elected to be murdered.

CHAPTER VI.

A NOBLE IS BROUGHT TO NINEPENCE.

ANY one who, even so recently as ten years back, had a visiting acquaintance with the suburbs of London, must be aware that nowhere round the outskirts of the metropolis were such fine, roomy old mansions to be met with as to the north, north-west, and north-east of the City.

The reason may not be hard to find. As a rule, householders, like witches, did not in the old days voluntarily cross water; and the Thames was a line of

demarcation which the merchant-princes of former times avoided when practicable. Far out west, noblemen and rich commoners built themselves residences ; but the City men of long ago looked themselves out convenient sites on which to build their country palaces. Hackney at one time was a salubrious village which the citizens much affected when in search of pure air ; and the old red brick houses with stone facings, which are fast being pulled down or converted into asylums, bear testimony that the citizens who there congregated possessed incomes by no means contemptible.

Round and about the now Victoria Park there used to be mansions in which one might have lodged any illustrious foreign visitor. Stoke Newington, and particularly that portion of Stoke Newington called Church Street, was abun-

dantly provided with spacious and comfortable houses, whilst Hornsey, Highgate, Finchley, and Hampstead were rich in fine old residences, surrounded by great forest trees and well-grown shrubs, and gardens secluded within goodly walls, on which grew nectarines, and peaches, and juicy pears, and Hawthornden apples, and other desirable fruits too many to enumerate.

Perhaps, however, Highgate could boast a larger number of such pleasant homes than any of the other districts mentioned; and it was to one of these that a certain Sir Alexander Kelvey, who had made a fortune in India, retired to spend the remainder of his days. Sir Alexander had left Scotland a very poor lad, and returned to England a very rich elderly man.

He had achieved great success in life.

He had risen to be a chief-justice, and to have the honour of knighthood conferred upon him, at a time when Misters were not transformed into Sirs so indiscriminately as is the case at present. He came back laden with testimonials. He had great vases of silver and gold. He might have ate off the precious metals at every meal had he been so disposed ; but in his age he retained the simple habits of his country and his youth, and his hoards of plate were never exhibited save as a curiosity to some intimate friend, or on the occasion of one of those rare banquets at which Sir Alexander—who was a widower—and an elderly maiden sister dispensed stately hospitality to old Indian friends and esteemed London acquaintances.

The care of his treasures was intrusted to his butler—a man grown grey in his

service. For years he had kept the key of the strong room, which contained articles of almost incalculable value; but the responsibility seemed to have sat lightly upon him, for, although a Scotchman and a Presbyterian, no more jovial person could have been met within a circuit of half-a-dozen miles than the butler at Hillview, as Sir Alexander's place was called.

The butler's brother was head gardener at Hillview. He had a small cottage in the kitchen garden, and "did for himself" as regards matters domestic; but there was very little to do, for he took most of his meals in the house, and, when not reading some quaint work of an old divine, or a well-thumbed book about gardening, spent his evenings either in the servants' hall or else in talking alone with his brother concern-

ing former times, and dead friends, and the days of their far-away youth.

This was the man who had been murdered—brutally murdered. Hillview, during the absence of its owner, chanced to be undergoing extensive alterations and repairs, and a labourer who happened to be the first at work on that especial morning found the unfortunate gardener lying on the grass in the flower-garden, his right hand clenched as if to defend himself, and his skull cleft open, evidently with a blow from a spade, which latter was found amongst a clump of rhododendrons close at hand. The body was quite warm, though the doctor, who quickly arrived on the spot, declared life must have been extinct for about three hours. Most probably, therefore, he had met with his death in the early dawn.

It was a summer's morning, and the

sun shone brightly over the scared group collected round the body. As for M'Callum, the butler, he was like a man distraught. The affection each of the brothers bore for the other was of no ordinary nature. Natives of a country where family ties are stronger, perhaps, than in any other land, they had the further bond between them of standing utterly alone in the world. All other relations, near and remote, were dead. As they often said, "If they went back to the old place they would have to seek their welcome in the kirkyard; living creature there was none to greet them."

"He was all I had," sobbed M'Callum, who had been roused from his sleep to hear of the murder; and the man knelt upon the grass—the sun slanting upon his grey hairs—and wept like a child.

There was not much work done that

day at Hillview ; but a large amount of beer was consumed. The painters and the paperhangers hung about in knots, discussing the question, and considering it from every possible and impossible point of view. At intervals the carpenters and masons joined them, while Barthorne, who had contracted to heat the house, and lay gas into all the principal rooms, found it so difficult to keep his own men together, that he directed them to leave off work at twelve o'clock, and himself retraced his way home about the same time.

He had, at an earlier period, spoken a few words of earnest sympathy to M'Callum, still distraught with grief, still unable to grasp the reality of his loss.

"We little thought of this last night," he remarked to Barthorne. "When he

was ready with his joke about your 'brew,' we had small notion we would never hear his voice again. Who could have done so black a deed? He never harmed even a worm—I have seen him throw them away, that his spade might not cut them—and there is not the value of a sixpence missing out of his bit house."

"Did not I hear somebody say a pane of glass in one of the library windows had been cut out?" asked Barthorne.

"Ay, there was some talk of that, I mind," answered the other; "but I had forgot. I can remember nothing but him. Well, well; we are all in the hands of the Lord, and He won't suffer my poor brother's blood to call out for vengeance in vain."

The next day came, and with it the coroner's inquest. Nothing fresh had

been elicited, no trace, not the slightest, of the murderer had been discovered.

The weather being exceptionally fine and dry, no mark of footsteps was to be found; and though the grass showed evidence of a struggle, the police were able to make little out of that fact. As nothing in the interior of the house appeared to have been disturbed, the theory advanced at the inquest, and accepted by the jury and society, was, that the deceased had interrupted an intending burglar in his felonious attempt, and that he had lost his life in trying to intercept the thief in his flight.

Then came the question, who was the thief?

The police racked their brains to think of any suspicious characters who had of late been seen loitering about the neigh-

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bourhood ; and one or two people were taken up who had never even known that such a place as Hillview was in existence. Out of his savings M'Callum offered a reward of one hundred pounds for such information as should lead to the detection of the criminal. But no information came ; and, meanwhile, the poor fellow who had been "wilfully murdered," according to the verdict of the coroner's jury, by "some person or persons unknown," lay in his decent, comfortable cottage—quiet enough—sleeping that sleep which knows no waking—here.

Mr. M'Callum had not been able quite to make up his mind as to the precise spot of earth his brother might have selected to occupy till the day of judgment, had five minutes' speech been permitted him before he died ; and Mr.

M'Callum was much exercised in spirit accordingly.

Sudden death was not an idea which had ever suggested itself to either of them. They came of a hardy stock—of a race that died of old age, of fever, of inflammation, of severe colds—but not of apoplexy, heart-disease, or any other of those short, sharp maladies, rapid in their action as a cannon-ball, and as unexpected, which summon the members composing some families to appear in eternity without a moment's grace being allowed for preparation.

Highgate Cemetery was adjacent; but then his brother did not “just care” for cemeteries. Despite his taste for trim lawns, and smooth walks, and well-kept shrubberies, M'Callum knew his heart had always kept a loving memory of a certain kirkyard, where, amidst waving

grass and rank weeds, a grey stone solemnly set forth that underneath, in the full hope of a glorious resurrection, one Mary Maxwell, aged eighteen years, lay at rest.

For her sake he had remained single all the years of his life, and consequently his brother leaned to the opinion that David might like his body to be laid in some snug spot of ground adjacent to that sunny corner close beside the grey stone wall, separating God's acre from the lonely acres beyond, where his betrothed was buried.

This was the sentimental view of the question. The other view was, that David had never cared to give needless trouble, and that doubtless, "poor lad" (so the grey-haired man spoke in his deep trouble of one but two years his junior—thereby proving that death is the

only elixir capable of restoring our youth), "he knew now full well he was as near Mary in one burying-place as another."

"He always spoke of Hornsey churchyard as a fair, quiet sort of spot," thought M'Callum at last, "and I'll e'en see if a bit of ground can be spared for him there."

It would puzzle any present Mr. M'Callum to find a bit of ground to spare for a stranger in that dear old churchyard now ; but the matter was capable of arrangement then, and the murdered man was finally interred where the earliest sunbeams fell athwart his grave.

Once there was a headstone above his resting-place, setting forth that David M'Callum, who died by the hand of some unknown assassin, on the 16th day of June, 18—, lay beneath.

"Vengeance is mine ; I will repay,

saith the Lord," was the text following the above inscription ; but M'Callum did not live to see the verification of the statement.

The mills of time grind so slowly, though they do grind so exceeding small, that if we cannot pin our faith upon the experience of others, we are extremely likely to find ourselves eventually destitute of faith altogether.

Before David M'Callum, however, was laid in his grave a curious thing occurred. The night before the coffin was screwed down, his brother James dreamed a singular dream, or said he dreamt it, which came to the same thing.

He thought he was lying in bed fast asleep, when he was awakened by some one shaking him, and found his brother standing at his side.

" You needn't be looking among

strangers for my murderer, James," this unlooked-for visitor remarked. "He is in this house every day, and——"

At this point James M'Callum averred he started up "in a white sweat, with every hair in his head standing straight on end;" and the dream, he further stated, produced such an effect upon him, that, "in the darkness of night," he resolved to ask every man employed about the place to lay a hand on his brother's body, and solemnly declare he was not the murderer.

Now, upon the face of it this did not appear a pleasant request to comply with, and the men looked doubtfully one at another, till at last a young carpenter, laying aside his plane, offered to lead the way.

"Poor old chap," he said, "I wish our touching him could bring him back among

us. I am sure nobody who ever knew what a good fellow he was would have hurt a hair of his head."

"Brayvo, Tom," cried his mates. "If it is any satisfaction to you, Mr. M'Callum, we will all go and pass our word over his body—though it did seem a bit queer at first," they added.

And so, solemnly, man after man stretched out his hand and touched the corpse, making at the same time asseveration that he had no act or part in the murder.

When all assembled had performed this ceremony, which before it was ended had assumed an importance impossible to have been predicted, a whisper went round that one person had not laid hand on the body of David M'Callum, and that person was Miles Barthorne.

"There is no call to trouble him,"

remarked the bereaved brother, looking with dull, lack-lustre eyes—eyes in which the hope of revenge seemed to be quenched—at the assemblage.

But still the whisper continued.

“We will have Barthorne,” decided the young carpenter already mentioned. “Just for the form of the thing—just to prove your dream false, Mr. M’Callum, we must have the word of every man who was about the premises.”

And with his young, active step he went in search of Barthorne, whom he found in the basement measuring up some quantities.

“Will you step down to the cottage for a minute?” said the self-elected messenger.

“Why should I?” asked Barthorne.

“You know old M’Callum has had a dream about his brother, and——”

"Has had the devil!" remarked Barthorne, folding up his rule and preparing to obey the summons.

"Well, it is natural he should take on," observed the young fellow, "for David was one in a hundred. Once at home, when we were awfully down on our luck—all out of work—and mother lying dying, the dear old boy brought us one night a bottle of wine and a couple of good mutton chops, and left them and half a sovereign behind him; and if I knew——"

But already Barthorne was out of hearing.

"What a surly, stand-aloof gentleman it is!" soliloquized the carpenter, as he slowly retraced his steps to the cottage.

There he found every one in a state of excitement. No man about the place had, after the first amazement wore off,

attached the slightest importance to the ordeal suggested by M'Callum.

They had touched the body to humour the old man, who, when he beheld hand after hand laid unhesitatingly upon the dead man's heart, began to think he had been "but foolish" after all.

He had felt it was a useless piece of formality sending for Barthorne; but when Barthorne, striding into the place, declared he would countenance no such superstitious absurdity, that nothing on earth should persuade him to lend himself to so gross a piece of fooling, the butler began to think his brother's "warning" had not been given in vain.

"I take it very hard," he said, "that any one who knew and respected my murdered brother should call my natural desire to bring justice home, fooling. That is not a meet word to use in the presence of the dead."

"Don't talk nonsense, M'Callum," interposed Barthorne ruthlessly. "The dead cannot hear you, and the living can. There is not a man present upon whom you have failed to fasten an insult by your ridiculous request. You have branded a lot of innocent people as possible murderers. And for what purpose? You cannot be such a simpleton, I take it, as to imagine if the murderer were present and laid his hand on your brother's wounds blood would gush out."

"I believe his blood cries aloud, and that the Almighty will hear that cry," was the reply. "I believe that the crime will be brought home yet—that it is being brought home even now."

"The sooner the better," replied Miles Barthorne. "But, meantime, you ought to discontinue this indecent mummery. As I said before, I will have nothing to

do with it. I pity your sorrow, but when sorrow degenerates into drivelling it is needful to draw a line."

A murmur of approval greeted this speech. Those who at first had thought very badly of Miles Barthorne because he refused to touch the dead man now found that his utterances exactly embodied their own opinions. In truth, the sort of suspicion cast upon those employed at Hillview was eminently unpleasant when each individual came to think the matter over in cool blood.

"There is a great deal of sense in what Barthorne says," one remarked to another. But the young carpenter merely observed, "He might have humoured poor old M'Callum. I don't think he'd have slept the worse for getting off his high horse for once."

Which was indeed very true. People

seldom lose much by being courteous and considerate.

All Miles Barthorne gained by his move was that his fellows remembered in after time he alone refused to touch the body, while James M'Callum went about the house and grounds muttering to himself, "He said it was one about the house, and Barthorne would not lay a hand on him : Barthorne is the man."

Really a most unpleasant conclusion for one human being to arrive at concerning another.

After David M'Callum's funeral, after Barthorne had completed his work and withdrawn his men, the butler made a sickening discovery. The gold plate and the silver plate were gone. The lock of the strong-room was intact—there was not a sign of violence to be observed—but the gold and the silver had vanished ;

how, M'Callum could not imagine ; when, he decided must have been the night of his brother's death.

He had informed Sir Alexander of the murder, and Sir Alexander was on his way back to England in consequence. Knowing this, knowing also how little good the police had effected, and feeling sensibly the truth of his own country proverb that the "silent sow sups the most brose," M'Callum waited his master's return. That Sir Alexander should suspect him of having made away with the plate was an idea which, to the credit both of master and servant, never entered his mind.

He had sense enough to know the plate was gone past recall, but he understood the criminal might remain within reach, and that the quieter affairs were kept the more likelihood there was of their being able to lay hands on him.

Except he alone, no human being beside the thief knew of those treasures being abstracted, and his object was to persuade the thief he, M'Callum, still remained in ignorance of the fact.

Accordingly he kept his own counsel, and carried a load of care about with him until Sir Alexander's arrival.

The morning after his master's return he told him everything which had occurred; and said boldly, for reasons hereafter to be given, that he believed Barthorne had stolen the plate and murdered his brother.

Now, the ex-judge, in virtue of his position, was a cautious man; and mere beliefs are occasionally difficult things to prove.

There was a vagueness about M'Callum's statements—an utter absence of succinctness about his narrative; “but

yet," thought the judge, "such apparently disjointed pieces of evidence are precisely those which, well fitted, make up a very fair map of criminal proceeding."

Now, Sir Alexander had peculiar means of obtaining authentic information about any man whose antecedents he wished to study, and ere long he knew much which was important about Miles Barthorne. He traced him back from Tottenham to Spindlethorpe, and forward from Tottenham to West Green. He found that wherever Miles Barthorne had been permitted the run of the house there was, sooner or later, a burglary committed.

"I will have his house searched," decided Sir Alexander; and he applied for a warrant accordingly.

When the officers entered, Miles Barthorne was sitting at tea with his wife,

his brother-in-law, and his little girl, now arrived at the discreet age of eleven. Certainly guilt was not stamped on the faces of any one of the party, and when the men, awkwardly enough, explained their errand and apologized for troubling him, he cheerily told them to search away, "they would not find anything contraband in his house."

There were two men, and one stayed downstairs while the other proceeded to examine the upper rooms, Mrs. Barthorne fidgeting in her chair the while, and at length she would have left the parlour, but that Barthorne stopped her.

"Sit still," he muttered. "What the — are you afraid of? Do you suppose, if my house was searched for ever, any one could find in it an article not honestly paid for and come by?"

As if in answer to this speech, the

man who had gone upstairs came down again, and, looking very white and excited, held out a card-case and a pair of filigree earrings, asking Barthorne if he could account for their possession.

There ensued a dead silence, during which Barthorne surveyed the articles; then he said, "I know nothing about them," and cast a look at his wife which a demon might have tried in vain to surpass in devilishness of expression.

"I am afraid we shall have to trouble you to come with us," remarked one of the policemen.

"All right," replied Barthorne, rising and putting on his hat.

"And you too, ma'am," said the other, turning to Mrs. Barthorne.

She went upstairs to put on her bonnet, the officer accompanying her.

While she was engaged in "dressing"

Miles took off his hat again, and brushing it round and round, said to Walter Chappell:

“If I am not back in time to finish the work for Phillips’ job, will you see to it? Everything ought to be ready for the morning,” and he looked meaningly at his brother-in-law.

“Yes; I will see to it,” was the reply, uttered almost carelessly.

“Good-bye for the present, then,” said Barthorne, stretching out his hand which Chappell grasped in silence.

At this juncture Mrs. Barthorne reappeared, and her husband intimated his readiness to depart.

“All is up with me. Remember!” whispered Miles to his brother-in-law, turning his head as he passed through the doorway. And with that utterance he left his home—never again to recross its threshold.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH MAB COMES TO THE RESCUE.

WALTER CHAPPELL remained standing at the door of the cottage long after his sister and her husband had passed out of sight.

He was stunned by the suddenness and completeness of the calamity. He could scarcely realize what had occurred. It seemed incredible to him that Barthorne, a free man half an hour previously, was now a prisoner almost as good as convicted. This was not a case of mere suspicion; there was a certainty about the whole business which left not the

merest loop-hole for hope to creep through.

That card-case, those filigree earrings must, he knew, prove damning evidence against his brother-in-law.

“And all through Lucy’s folly,” he thought.

For the third time in Miles Barthorne’s experience a woman had upset the coach in which he meant to reach the goal of his life.

Feminine acquisitiveness — feminine vanity — feminine disregard of warning — feminine disbelief in the possibility of any danger not immediately apparent and immediate, had induced Mrs. Barthorne to rescue those articles which her husband laid out for destruction. She had purloined them from a (to him) useless heap, destined to be consumed in the smithy fire.

With all his foresight and calculation, Barthorne never imagined the possibility of such a casualty as this. He could have made affidavit that all the London detectives might search his house and find nothing compromising in it. He had been careful and cautious to an extent that Chappell often ridiculed, and to no purpose. From a totally unexpected quarter the blow had come. Those accursed knick-knacks, the like of which he would cheerfully have bought for his wife could he have imagined her soul longed for them, had compassed his ruin as effectually as chests full of plate, as cupboards filled with valuables belonging to other people.

“It was all up with him,” as he said, and in a dim, confused kind of way Walter Chappell began to wonder if it would soon be all up with him also—if

he might not be dragged into the affair as an accomplice, and haled off to jail, there to await his trial for all the sins he had committed.

If ever a man was suddenly converted, that man was Walter Chappell. If ever a man's eyes were opened to a perception of the deformity of wickedness, Walter Chappell's were in that hour.

Fear came upon him, and produced instant conviction that, after all, honesty was the best policy. He turned sick with dread; and though he promised no votive offerings to his patron saint, no stained window or communion service to Tottenham Old Church—no gifts to the poor of the parish, or almshouse for necessitous widows, he did make a vow that, if he only escaped from the peril which menaced him, he would turn over a new leaf, forswear his evil ways, lead a better

life, and never make another sovereign or crown-piece save in the way of legitimate trade.

"It is a bad job," remarked the policeman who still stayed in the house. "That is true enough ; but fretting about things makes them no better."

"I am certain he had no notion anything of the sort was in his house," answered Chappell, more because he desired to make some reply than for any other reason.

The policeman shook his head, and smiled. "Likely not," he said. "People don't generally keep such things lying about loose, if they know where they came from. I should say, now, he *had* no notion anything of the sort was in his house."

"Are you going to stay here long?" asked the other desperately.

"Well, yes. I suspect my mate can't be back yet awhile, and it will take a tidyish time to search the premises thoroughly. We haven't found much so far, you see."

"I do not believe there is anything more to find," answered Chappell; "and I have no doubt my sister will be able to account satisfactorily for having those articles in her possession. She is fond of jewellery and bargains, and——"

"Perhaps you don't happen to know where that there card-case and those slight-looking earrings came from?"

"No, that I don't," returned Chappell. "She never showed them to me; and I do not know how or where she got them."

"Where she got them is a different matter; though, perhaps, I could give a guess as to that also," was the reply.

“But I do know where they came from. They were among a lot of things stolen last winter, from Lane House, Enfield Chase. We have been looking out for some trace of them ever since. Tortoise-shell card-case, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, design, rose, thistle, and shamrock, lined with pink velvet—silver hinge and snap, and initials engraved on a silver plate at the top.”

“But that proves nothing. She might have bought it from any one.”

“She might; but then, you see, she will have to prove that.”

“I thought,” said Chappell, a little scornfully, “there was some saying about every man being considered innocent till he was proved guilty.”

“I have heard a saying to that purpose myself,” was the calm reply; “but I fancy it a great deal simpler to consider

every man guilty till he is proved innocent. That is what we all do, at any rate."

"Well, talking about it won't mend the matter," remarked Chappell, "and standing idle won't clear either of them. I'll just finish the work he spoke of, and then go and see some lawyer."

And so saying, he flung off his coat and waistcoat, turned up his shirt-sleeves, lit the forge fire, and commenced his labours.

"I didn't know you were a smith," remarked the policeman, leaning against the door-lintel, and idly looking on.

"Neither I am; but I have helped Barthorne now and then, and can do any simple work like this;" and Chappell, as he spoke, chucked about a dozen bits of steel into the fire.

"What are you making?" asked the other.

"Only a bar for a fender just now. I shall have to finish some chimney-rods before I go home."

"Well, that is queer, too," observed the policeman.

If he had only known how queer it was, this story would never have been written. Had he known that Chappell's laboured breathing arose not from the severity of his toil, but from the agony of apprehension he was experiencing, Policeman Blank's promotion had proved a very rapid affair; but, as matters stood, he had really not the faintest idea that before his very eyes the whole plant of a coiner was being destroyed.

He had been sent to Barthorne's to search for silver and gold and other valuables, and it never occurred to him that the bits of metal Chappell picked so carelessly from amongst the coal-dust on

the forge were moulds that had been employed to convert stolen goods into sterling coin. Even to the milling machine, which Chappell picked carelessly off the lathe, everything was destroyed before the policeman's eyes.

Then, when the whole mass was red hot, Chappell said—

“I must look after the child before I do any more.”

“The child!” repeated Policeman Blank, with a sudden sense of having neglected his duty. “Where is she?”

“We had better go and see,” answered her uncle. “Poor little thing! I forgot all about her.”

They passed together through the kitchen, which was empty. Then they entered the parlour, furnished with some pretensions to taste as well as comfort. The front door was still bolted, as the

policeman had fastened it when he went into the forge with Chappell.

“Mab!” cried her uncle; but there came no answer, till they entered the bedroom where the discovery had been made which resulted in such a loss to Barthorne.

There, with the evening sun shining in upon her, lighting up everything in the room, and bathing the trees at Harringhay in a flood of golden colour, lay the child huddled up on the counterpane, her face hidden amongst the pillows, her right arm under her head, her left flung listlessly down, in an attitude of utter and hopeless grief.

As the two men entered she started up, and, pushing her hair back from her face, stained and swollen with weeping, asked—

“Did you want me, uncle? I—I——”

And then she broke down, and began to cry bitterly.

“Don’t do that, Mab,” entreated Chappell. “Be a good girl, and dry your eyes, and I will take you to your mamma to-night.”

But Mab only shook her head in reply ; and then it suddenly dawned upon Walter Chappell that by some means she understood all that had been going on ; that this child, for whose pleasure he made the copper medal—the suggester of such sin and misery—knew enough to convict her father and himself—to hang them, even, he thought, for Chappell’s knowledge of the laws of his country was as limited as that possessed by nine hundred and ninety-nine persons out of every thousand.

He had been hot enough coming out of the forge ; but now he turned as cold as

ice. In a moment it was given to him to behold Nemesis in the shape of a thin, sallow-faced, dark-eyed child. First his sister, then his sister's daughter. Like Miles Barthorne, Walter Chappell felt it was too much, and so answered irritably—

“Well, at any rate, stop crying, for heaven's sake, and I will take you home with me till your mother comes back.”

It was noticeable that Chappell did not say father and mother; but Policeman Blank, who had children of his own, and whose heart was stirred with a great compassion for the small creature who was in such great trouble, was not a clever individual, and had no eyes or thought for anything save Mab, for whom he felt the profoundest pity.

“Why, that is the best thing you can do with the poor dear,” he remarked

approvingly. "Take her away with you. She could not stay here all alone; and the neighbours might only torment her, even if they did take her in."

"I shan't trouble anybody to take in my sister's child, you may be sure of that," said Chappell a little indignantly.

He was more confident now. If once he could get Mab away, and ascertain exactly how much she knew, he might make some effort for his own preservation.

"Don't cry any more than you can help, Mab. I shall have finished some work I am doing for your father in half an hour at the outside, and then we will go away to London together. You will like to go with Uncle Walter, won't you, dear?" he asked, with more tenderness in his tone than he had yet evinced when addressing her. She was a person to

conciliate now. She had ceased, in his eyes, to be a mere child; she was a possible witness; and already Mab unconsciously reaped a certain benefit from her change of position.

"Yes," she answered, "I shall like to go with you, if I may."

"Then have your bonnet on in half an hour," said Walter Chappell, "and then we will start for London together."

Often afterwards he wondered how he did it—wondered how he had been able to speak so quietly, to act so naturally, to think so rapidly. He wondered how he was calm enough to talk as he did, to finish his work, even to the chimney-stays he had talked about, to ask the policeman to give him a helping hand by holding the iron he was fashioning, to suggest the desirability of beer to that functionary, and request him to draw from one of the

casks which had given offence to Barthorne's neighbours sufficient to quench the thirst of both.

Shortly afterwards Chappell and his niece left the house—not much too soon, as it turned out subsequently, for they had not bade the policeman “Good evening,” and been gone fifteen minutes, before the more diligent officer who found the card-case returned, and hearing of their departure, said breathlessly—

“You never let Chappell go without following him !”

“What should I follow Chappell for ?” was the answer. “There is nothing against the man.”

“That is as it may be,” was the reply. “At any rate, I must go back and hear what is to be done now. Don’t let anybody in till I come back again, on any pretence whatsoever.”

“All right,” answered the other, and closed and bolted the door.

Meanwhile Walter Chappell and his companion were walking to London. He had asked which she should like best, to take the omnibus at the High Cross, or walk to the Cock at Highbury. Without a minute’s hesitation, she answered—

“Oh! walk, please, uncle; and do let us go across the fields.”

So, hand in hand, they walked down the Black Boy Lane and along that path which is a short cut over the triangular bit of common which abuts on Hanger Lane; and then they climbed the stile which gives access to a path leading away to the Green Lanes, and at the end of the path, crossing the main road at the Tile Kilns, they wended their way over the New River and so to Hornsey Wood House, since pulled down, in order

that the new Finsbury Park might not retain a vestige of anything old, picturesque, or romantic about it.

When they had passed the old tavern—a drawing of which may be seen by the curious in Hone's "Everyday Book"—and turned sharp off to their left and entered the path which formerly led straight down to the Seven Sisters Road, the girl, after first looking cautiously round, to make sure no one was near at hand, said—

"I have got something, uncle; what must I do with it?" and she drew out of her small pocket a curious foreign-looking dagger, the handle of which was rich in ornament, the design being marked here and there by precious stones, not, perhaps, of intrinsically great value, but which conferred an imposing appearance of brilliancy on the pattern.

Chappell had never seen this before. He turned the weapon over in his hand, looking at it curiously, then asked—

“Where did you get this, Mab?”

“I knew mamma had it hidden away,” answered the child. “I saw her take it; I saw her hide it. She told me I must never tell any one. She and papa had a quarrel that morning. She wanted to keep it, and said no one would ever be the wiser; and he asked her if she was mad to think of such a thing; and he took it away and put it—you know where; and then some one came to speak to him about work, and while he was outside she took it out again and hid it. After the men came this evening I remembered, and when they were gone”—there was a break in the narrative for a moment—“when the one man and papa and mamma were gone, I crept upstairs

and looked for it, and when everything was quiet, I thought I would go out and throw it into some ditch; but when I came down I found the door bolted, and I dared not unfasten it. So I went upstairs again, and lay down on the bed, and said my prayers and all the hymns and good verses that would stay in my head over and over again. I said them till I was nearly silly, and then you came, uncle."

Prayers, hymns, verses, with any good in them! Could such utterances really have been in a house where sin had taken up a permanent habitation? Prayers, hymns, verses. Vaguely Walter Chappell found himself mentally repeating, in a sort of amazed wonder, those three words, whilst all the time his mind was busy conjecturing where the dagger had come from, marvelling how he should

dispose of it, and puzzling himself as to what he ought to do with his niece.

When once again, after crossing the Seven Sisters Road, they came upon the course of the New River, he paused, uncertain whether to drop the weapon into the water or not. Again, however, his good genius, which had come to his rescue more than once that evening, stood his friend.

He was well known to many persons by sight along that route. He had traversed the road, indeed, far too often to suppose it possible for even a small action of the kind to escape notice from some chance acquaintance who might be near enough to recognize him. No ; he must run no risks. He must carry the accursed thing on with him still farther into the heart of the great metropolis, and there, where even temporary possession could

never be brought home to him, lose this fresh evidence of his sister's folly and cupidity.

"Shall I take it, uncle?" asked the girl, as they continued their course after that lingering look at the waters of Sir Hugh Myddleton. "I am not afraid now."

He stopped, and pulling her a little forward, so that he could see her face distinctly, said—

"Mab, you frighten me. In heaven's name, when and where have you learnt all your wisdom?"

"I could not help learning," she answered simply, tears filling her great dark eyes as she spoke. "I could not help hearing and knowing. Many and many a night, when you all thought I was asleep, and you were busy, I have cried till I could cry no longer, with my head under the

bed-clothes, for fear mamma would hear me and be angry."

"Did you know what we were doing, Mab?" he inquired, with an irrepressible shudder.

"Yes; you were making money," she replied; "and mamma was always saying to me, when you had made enough we should go away and have carriages, and horses, and servants, and live like ladies and gentlemen; and used to be angry with me for being frightened when papa was out late at night. I always was afraid something dreadful had happened to him. I did not know what; but now something dreadful has happened," and the child, who had forgotten her sorrow for a minute, began to cry again quietly, but, nevertheless, bitterly.

Chappell did not make an effort to console her. It was growing dark as

they emerged from Highbury Terrace and entered the Holloway Road, through those iron gates which stood opposite to the old station of the North London Railway. He knew she would attract little if any notice from the passers-by. Nevertheless, perhaps with that certain instinct of self-preservation which acts as an additional sense to so many persons whose ordinary complement of senses would, in extremity, serve them but little, he selected the least frequented side of the road leading to London, and walked far away from the shops under the shade of the trees which make that part of Islington seem so rural to persons accustomed to the more modern suburbs, where groves of brick and mortar have taken the place of forest trees, and porticoes of a more or less pretentious design, with flights of

stone steps leading to nowhere in particular, and great bay windows, affording opportunities for a fine view of over the way, and up and down the crescent, have elbowed creepers, and climbing roses, and clustering vines out of fashion.

When they had walked some distance along Islington High Street, always keeping, as I have said, on the darkest side of that wide thoroughfare, Chappell suddenly changed his course, and struck right across into Barnsbury. In one of the loneliest and quietest roads which still abound in that locality, he dropped the dagger, then doubling and twisting, the pair retraced their steps and made straight for the Angel.

Arrived there, he crossed the then Pentonville Road, and, almost following the crow's flight, walked on towards Clerkenwell.

Where he had lodged in the days of his apprenticeship he still remained, and the mere lapse of time, to say nothing of his own uniformly good behaviour in that familiar home, had given him a pleasant sort of proprietorship in the house, where he came and went with a sense of greater freedom than if it had been his own.

For a man is never quite free to come or to go when he has a mother, or wife, or sister, or housekeeper, or servants, to scrutinize his proceedings, whereas the old lady with whom Chappell lodged had her own affairs to attend to, and never attempted to obtain a vested interest in the young man's business.

He paid his way, and gave her very little trouble, and she, honest soul, never troubled her head as to what time he reached home at night, or whether, indeed, he ever reached it at all.

It was in one of those large houses in Red Lion Street which are now let out in suites at five and six shillings a week for work-rooms, and tenth-rate offices, that Walter Chappell had resided ever since he first went to Nelson Brothers.

He had begun with one small room on the third floor, and he now occupied three rooms on the first.

Mab Barthorne knew her uncle's house well. She had spent many a pleasant hour there. She and her father and mother had often taken tea in the cheerful drawing-room before going to the theatre, or Astley's, or any one of the other places of amusement visiting which was the only relaxation Barthorne permitted himself.

She was familiar with every print on the walls, with every book in the room; no drawer had been safe from her investi-

gation, no cupboard in her uncle's small domain held anything capable of concealment from her inquiring spirit. But now as Mab crawled wearily up the staircase, her little shawl awry, her bonnet only kept on the back of her neck by the strength of the strings which tied it, her handkerchief wet as if it had come out of a washtub, and her gloves damp with holding her handkerchief, she felt as if life even in Red Lion Street was not worth having.

One of the things the world, so wise in many matters, will never know for certain, is the age at which a precocious child begins to have a keen knowledge of good and evil, so far as good and evil affect itself and those belonging to it.

Now essentially Mab Barthorne was a precocious child—precocious in her sensibility, precocious in her sense.

For many a long day she had carried about a woman's heart in a child's body. No need to tell her to be cautious and reticent—no need to put her on guard about babbling home affairs to the multitude. As Walter Chappell recalled the nature of the deed she had performed that evening, the words she had used in speaking of her own fears and trouble, he felt he might safely leave Mab to choose her own course for herself; that any warnings he could give would only bewilder her, and tend to disturb that subtle instinct which already had stood her father—still unconscious of the benefit—in such stead.

All he insisted upon was that she should eat a biscuit and drink a little hot negus before going to bed.

“You must swallow it,” he said, holding the glass, which she had already

rejected, again towards her. "I cannot have you laid up on my hands now. They are too full as it is."

"Can they do anything to you, uncle?" she whispered, clasping her hands round his neck as she bade him good-night, putting her lips close to his ear to ask the question.

"I think not. I hope not," he answered. "I knew nothing of the card-case or the earrings. I did not know till to-night where they came from."

"Did you know nothing of all the silver and gold we used to have at our house?"

"I knew it was there, my dear, that was all."

"Then how did you help papa to make money, if——"

He checked the inevitable question he felt coming, and said—

“Do not let us speak of it any more, Mab, now. Some day, when you are older, when you can understand everything more fully, I will tell you the whole truth; but I will tell you one thing, my dear, now—that if it pleases God that no harm comes to me through this matter, I will try to be a better man in the future than I have ever been in the past; yes, whether harm comes or not, I will try hard.”

And thus Walter Chappell published the vow he had made standing beside the cottage door at West Green.

After his niece was in bed and asleep, he started off in search of a lawyer to undertake Barthorne's defence. He knew of one residing in Guildford Street, willing to attend business at any hour of the day or night: to him—avoiding the House of Correction on his way—Chap-

pell accordingly went. By the time he had told the solicitor all he wished to tell him—or ever, in fact, meant to tell any one concerning the business—and had again reached Red Lion Street, it was growing late, or rather early, for eleven o'clock had struck by St. James', Clerkenwell, before he left his lodgings for Mr. Westroe's house, and as he turned out of Snow Hill, which route he had selected on his way home, he heard St. Sepulchre's chime out first the four quarters making a perfect hour, and then solemnly ONE.

Entering Red Lion Street, not from Clerkenwell Green or St. John's Gate side, but from an obscure little lane running almost parallel with Cow Cross Street, Chappell noticed a man standing on the opposite side of the way, looking up at the windows of the house he occupied.

With a steady tread, Chappell paced on towards Clerkenwell Green, and then made his way down the alley leading to St. John's Square, and thence to Red Lion Street.

The man was still on the opposite side of the way, engaged at the moment in an apparent attempt to light a pipe.

Then the young man knew he was suspected and watched.

"Let them watch," he thought, "they can prove nothing against me now."

About the same hour when Chappell made that mental observation the policeman left in charge of Barthorne's cottage at West Green, feeling, after a long sleep in an arm-chair, somewhat stiff and chilly, rose in order to stretch himself, and walked towards the door with the intention of looking out and seeing what sort of night it was.

As he stood, only half awake, fumbling

first for the latch and then for the bolt, there was a report as if a cannon had been fired off at his ear, there was a flash of light in the smithy, followed by a crashing of bricks as if fifty Irish labourers had let their hods fall from the top of a three-storey house.

It seemed as if a whole pane of glass could not be left in the cottage, and, in a panic of fear, the man somehow opened the door and rushed out into the night.

When morning dawned it was found that the whole of Barthorne's forge had been blown out. There was a huge rent in the side of the smithy, the bellows were in ribbons, of the forge not one brick remained on another. The tools were scattered about in all directions, and the glass in the skylight lay shivered round the garden and the adjacent fields.

How it was blown up the authorities

never could discover ; why it was blown up, those most interested in Barthorne's secrets were utterly unable to imagine ; not a trace of anything suspicious was found amongst the *débris*, save some particles of copper adhering to fragments of fire-clay. The police had a theory that Barthorne must have possessed a hidden furnace, where all the plate he was supposed to have stolen was at once melted down ; and this idea received confirmation from the fact that, beyond the card-case and the filigree earrings, no article of value, save what the accused had legitimately purchased, could be found on his premises, and that the most diligent inquiry, and enormous offers of reward, failed to discover where any of the stolen goods had been disposed of—save in one instance, and that exception only proved the rule.

Four days after Miles Barthorne's arrest, a poor old woman was given in charge for attempting to pawn a certain foreign dagger, she being unable to account satisfactorily for its possession.

Before the magistrate she repeated the statement she had made when a police officer was sent for by the pawnbroker.

"I found it, your Honour," she sobbed.

"I picked it up in a street leading out of the Liverpool Road; I don't remember the name of the street, but I was coming back from doing a hard day's washing, your worship, and the lady would speak to my character."

"Now will you be silent?" interrupted the magistrate; then turning to the constable, he said, "Some special importance attaches to this dagger, I think?"

"Yes, your worship," answered the constable. "It was one of the articles

stolen from Hillview House, Sir Alexander Kelvey's place at Highgate, the time David M'Callum was murdered."

Walter Chappell, reading the *Times* at the chop-house where he usually dined, came suddenly upon this paragraph.

He laid down his knife and fork, left the paper on the table, paid his reckoning in silence, and walked out into the open air.

The fact of the murder and the fact of the robbery had not been made known previously in connection one with the other.

But now in a moment the dagger he himself had dropped supplied a hitherto missing link, which, truth to tell, he in some vague sort of way had always dreaded to find.

Mab's premature wisdom had saved her father's life—that life so nearly risked by his wife's folly.

But Miles Barthorne was a murderer. Through all the business of the day—through the hours of the night, when he lay awake and restless, in the snatches of troubled sleep that came to him at intervals, that refrain rang through his brain; till his mind grew sick and tired with its persistence as much as with its horror.

Miles Barthorne was a murderer. The man who was lying in jail upon a comparatively trivial charge had blood on his hands—the blood of a fellow-creature who had never wronged him or his.

Though a thousand witnesses came forward to prove an alibi, Walter Chappell felt he never could be persuaded of his innocence.

“He murdered the man,” thought Chappell; “and if that dagger had been found in his house, they would have hung him to a certainty.”

As matters turned out afterwards, however, Barthorne's accomplice in outwitting the authorities at the Mint felt that if Mab had left the weapon where her mother hid it away, the lives of many people would subsequently have proved much more endurable than they did.

CHAPTER VIII.

SENTENCED.

To Miles Barthorne the agonies of years were concentrated in the short time which elapsed before he knew that his forge was destroyed, and that nothing to inculpate him in the Highgate murder had been, after diligent search, discovered by the police in his house. If his wife, notwithstanding her knowledge of the peril incurred, could have been such a simpleton—he put the last word differently, and prefaced his version with a couple of strong adjectives—as to hide away two such trumpery articles as those

on the strength of which he had been taken in charge, Barthorne's common sense told him there was nothing else—nothing which she might have refrained from secreting.

Once again a woman's hand had dashed the cup of success from his lips. Through the act of a woman, and that woman his wife, every hope of his existence was destroyed; and it might be also—well, this was not a contingency on which he cared to dwell, though at intervals it would force its presence upon him, and compel him to think of that morning's work at Highgate—of the dead man's living brother—of a charge different from theft—of an attentive jury and a stern judge—the verdict, “guilty,” and the sentence, “to be hanged by the neck till you are dead.”

Not a nice sort of possibility, this, for a

man to have to try to shun, with nothing to distract his attention, nothing to divert his thoughts, nothing to lean against save uncertainty, nothing to be quite sure of except that he stood in a position of fearful peril. There have been men, it is said, whose hair has turned grey in a single night containing less misery than Miles Barthorne endured for nights and days, which seemed to lengthen themselves out into an eternity of torture.

If M'Callum had but known all his brother's murderer passed through after his arrest he must have felt satisfied. David, sleeping in Hornsey Churchyard, was amply revenged. The mills of Time already had Barthorne between their stones, and imperceptibly, it is true, but still certainly, were grinding his heart. He could not have suffered as he did had the human fiat gone forth. No con-

demned cell ever contained a wretch who suffered such fear as Barthorne had to bear and show no sign. But relief came at last. After two remands he was committed for trial with no fresh evidence against him.

Walter Chappell had been taken into custody, and, after one remand, discharged, with a remark from the magistrate, that although he thought the police had not, under the circumstances, exceeded their duty in arresting him, he felt bound to say he left the court without a stain on his character—which was certainly very gratifying to Mr. Walter Chappell.

Mr. Westroe, acting for him, remarked to his client that he might deem himself extremely lucky; for it was the fact that the lawyer never for one moment thought of believing Chappell innocent. He con-

sidered it not only possible, but probable, that the older and cleverer criminal had drawn the younger into the commission of sins he would never have eliminated out of the shallows of his own imagination ; but although Chappell declared with many an asseveration that he had neither head nor hand in any of the robberies of which Barthorne was suspected, Mr. Westroe's opinion did not waver in the least.

The day of the trial came, and every available seat in the poking court was filled with people who had known Barthorne either privately or in the way of business. Tottenham sent its representatives, and West Green also. M'Callum headed a select party from Highgate : and gentlemen who had availed themselves of Barthorne's skill as a workman, appeared as interested listeners, anxious

to hear whether, in the course of the trial, any light would be thrown on the manner in which their own plate-chests had been emptied.

Barthorne's first London friend, the Tottenham smith, had come up from his country home to give evidence as to the prisoner's good character whilst in his employment, and probably his wife would have accompanied him, had he given her the faintest inkling of the nature of the business which took him to town.

Taking public opinion round, those whose goods had not been stolen, or who possessed no goods to steal, felt some sympathy for the man; but no one felt any sympathy for the woman. She had never been popular—never tried to make herself popular. Wives spoke of her as a "stuck-up piece of goods," and husbands considered it a "main hard thing

that a fellow who worked as Barthorne had worked should be sent to jail because a woman fancied a card-case she could never use, and a pair of earrings she could never wear."

Indeed, had it not been for that ugly doubt as to whether Barthorne were not a murderer as well as a thief, popular feeling would have been entirely in his favour.

Certainly since he first came to Tottenham people never spoke so well of him as when he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey.

Nothing had been found in his house except the card-case and the earrings, and who knew how Mrs. Barthorne had come to be possessed of them? Bets were laid as to whether he would get off or not; and there was much speculation as to what the nature of the sentence might be, in the event of a conviction.

In any case, let the result of the trial be what it would, the Barthornes could never again hold up their heads about West Green—which idea so pleased those whom their prosperity had irritated, that the bulk of the interested court hoped Barthorne would be able to make a good defence.

But in this hope they were doomed to disappointment.

Barthorne pleaded "Guilty," Mrs. Barthorne pleaded "Not Guilty."

For very sufficient reasons Mr. Westroe had advised both husband and wife to answer "Guilty"; but Mrs. Barthorne declined following his counsel, and engaged separate professional assistance for herself.

The result proved her superior wisdom; for an intelligent jury found that there was no evidence to convict her, and returned a verdict of acquittal.

There was a stir and murmur in the court after the foreman announced the decision to which himself and his eleven brethren had arrived—a stir and murmur, not of approval; but the crier, in a rich beery voice, shouted out “Silence!” and the sounds died away.

Indeed, there was almost a dead silence while Miles Barthorne, now alone in the dock, stood awaiting his sentence.

After a long preamble from the judge it came at last: To be transported for seven years.

Seven years! The words fell like a blow on Barthorne. He turned white to his lips, and the court, judge, jury, and spectators, swam round before his eyes.

One of the turnkeys, thinking him about to faint, put out a hand to catch him, and the action, slight though it was, steadied the man’s nerves.

“Let me alone, will you!” he said in a savage whisper. “I don’t deserve it, but I can bear it;” and then, without once glancing round the audience, without taking one last look at freedom, ere going into servitude, he turned and went away from the gaze of those who had known and envied him at the time when he lived at West Green—a time that seemed now farther distant than the days of his childhood.

The game had almost brought him fortune—the play had nearly been successful. If David M’Callum had not met him that morning, or if he could so far have shaken off the superstitious repugnance he felt to touching the corpse, as to bring himself to lay even a finger on the dead man’s body, suspicion had never fallen upon him.

Or if—and this was even a bitterer

thought—he had either not married, or married a different woman, suspicion might have fallen, and still done him no great harm.

“Yes,” he thought; “from childhood until now women have cursed my life. If ever a woman works evil for me again, it will be my own fault—that I swear.”

Whilst he lay in prison, the woman whose act had brought this last calamity upon him was searching London for some trace of her brother and her child.

Both had disappeared. They were vanished as utterly as though the waters of oblivion had closed over their heads.

Through his solicitor, Barthorne sent her a message, charging her not to come near him. “Voluntarily,” he remarked to Chappell before the trial, “I will never see your sister again.”

“And certainly you will not see much

of my sister's brother," added Chappell, mentally.

Mrs. Barthorne, however, was determined to see her husband again, and, armed with an order, repaired to the prison, where he waited till the time should come for him to leave England.

She threw herself on her knees before him, and in an agony of grief besought his forgiveness.

"I will go to Australia also," she sobbed; "I would go to the world's end with you. I will do anything you tell me, if you will only forgive me."

Miles Barthorne listened to her with a set, hard face. When she had quite finished her petition, when she had exhausted her lamentations, and tired herself with weeping, he said—

"Will no one take this woman away before I kill her?" and then with a

shiver, as his own sentence recalled something he was always trying to forget, he retreated to the farthest corner of his cell, and stood there, with his eyes averted, while the turnkeys carried his wife out into the passage, and, locking the door, parted them.

For months she haunted Mr. Westroe's offices, in hopes of hearing something of her child and brother, but Mr. Westroe was as ignorant of their whereabouts as she. At the end of a year, however, she obtained a clue which induced her to think Walter Chappell and the child had gone to America; and thither, not being destitute of money, she started in quest of them.

And thus the family dropped out from amongst the acquaintances who had known them in their days of apparent prosperity. Their very name became an

almost forgotten word. Strangers came and strangers went about West Green and Tottenham, and the story of the handsome smith was remembered but by a very few old inhabitants of those neighbourhoods.

In or near London, it is not difficult to compass being forgotten. The tide of human life flows so fast through the great metropolis, that a man's memory scarcely lasts so long in the recollection of his fellows as a name written on the sand remains legible on the seashore.

And, indeed, even at Abbotsleigh and around Spindlethorpe, Miles, the illegitimate son of the old squire, had dropped out of mind.

Glendy was dead, his widow had sold his business, and left that part of the country.

Mrs. Barthorne was dead likewise, and

another squire than John—who gave fifty pounds to enable the discarded heir to earn an honest trade—reigned at the Hall.

The years which, to contemplate in prospective, seemed so long and so capable of bringing wealth and position to the son of the bond-woman, had flitted by silently and swiftly, and the result was that, with oceans stretching between himself and England, Barthorne was working out the days and the months of his heavy sentence, whilst the very fact of his ever having existed was an almost forgotten memory.

Not by one man, however. James M'Callum remembered; the blood of his dead brother still, to his morbid fancy, seemed crying aloud for vengeance on his murderer.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REV. DIONYSIUS AND MRS. WRIGHT. \

ABOUT six years after the day when Miles Barthorne received his sentence of expatriation, when the story of his sin and his punishment, and the other story of his suspected sin and punishment still deferred, remained only in those short and significant records which can be inspected free at the Old Bailey, and in the memories of a few people connected with the criminal, the Reverend Dionysius Wright, Rector of Fisherton-on-Thames, found himself in a difficulty.

Inclusively at the same time Selina, wife of the above, found herself in a difficulty also.

To the Reverend Dionysius and Mrs. Wright this experience was no novelty. From the first year of their marriage they had found themselves at intervals in precisely the same position.

Difficulty, pecuniary difficulty, had for years ate with them, drank with them, slept and walked with them, boarded and lodged with them; it pervaded the air they breathed, and was part and parcel of their being. Had a legacy been bequeathed to them, and the possibility of paying their way for a time without anxiety been presented, they would have felt out of their natural element, got rid of their money, and plunged into the old slough of debt, as soon as might be. Therefore it was not the fact of impe-

cuniosity which troubled the reverend gentleman so grievously. It was merely that, for once in his varied experience, he really could perceive no way of relieving, even temporarily, his embarrassments.

It is not at all likely that when the Rev. Dionysius started in life he voluntarily chose the path he had for years and years been traversing, yet he drifted into it very early in his career, and it was now too late, as he himself sometimes said with a sigh, to retrace his steps.

Despondency, however, was not the failing of Mrs. Wright. She had a fixed belief that, if her husband could only induce his creditors to wait a little longer, and still a little, help would come.

Help had come so often, and from such unlooked-for quarters, that Mrs. Wright was sometimes wont to declare it would be downright rebellion against Providence

to imagine it would not arrive once more, all in Heaven's good time.

"You may depend upon it, Dion," she said, in a tone of solemn conviction, "that although we cannot hear its footsteps, assistance is on its way to us even now."

In the same manner as we are told orphanages and other charitable institutions are occasionally supported entirely by the power of faith, so hitherto Mr. and Mrs. Wright had, by means of faith in their fellow-creatures and the goodness of Providence, managed somehow to pay baker and butcher, and other tradespeople, when the day came on which those individuals declared, severally and collectively, they would not wait another hour for their money.

But a crisis had at length occurred. It commenced about eighteen months after

Mr. Wright's induction to the living of Fisherton. A bill which had been renewed and held over, and renewed and held over again, for a series of periods of which the Reverend Dion's memory could retain no accurate recollection, was now—in consequence of the original possessor's death—in the hands of a very different man, of a man who "considered business was business," who did not intend to let himself be cheated "by Jew or Gentile, parson or layman," who "meant to have his money by fair means or foul," and who gave the Rector of Fisherton to understand that some definite understanding on the subject must be arrived at.

As a definite understanding on the subject of money, unless he were to be the recipient, was the last thing on earth poor Mr. Wright ever desired, he tried to

stave the matter off, and actually did succeed in doing this for a period of nearly ten weeks.

At the end of that time came a lawyer's letter. Mr. Wright called to see the lawyer, and obtained a fortnight's longer grace. No remittance, however, arriving, even when a week longer than the fortnight had passed, a writ was served upon the Rector, and in twelve days more judgment was obtained against him. Then of course all the household goods—all the well-worn furniture, all the patternless carpets, all the faded curtains, the old out-of-tune six-octave square pianoforte, and other miscellaneous effects—including a half-length portrait of Mr. Wright, in gown and bands, holding a prayer-book in his hand, having to his right an oriel window, and to his left an old-fashioned cabinet, decorated with

sundry vases and pieces of old china ; and another half-length portrait, this time of Mrs. Wright, in curls and a low dress, holding a lace handkerchief and a rose in her left hand, whilst with the right she was gathering jessamine from the outside of the oriel window above referred to,—all these things, representing to the clergyman and his wife the comforts and elegancies of a refined home, as well as the luxuries of departed days, were at the mercy of the destroyer.

But the destroyer was merciful; though Mrs. Wright, in the privacy of her husband's study, called him a brute, and declared the wretch had so unnerved her she could scarcely say her prayers, he really did act so very badly.

In consideration of Mr. Wright handing his solicitor ten pounds down, and signing promissory notes payable at intervals

extending over a year, he agreed to give further time. The ten pounds, however, only covered the costs; so the debt remained as much as ever, plus the interest.

“Dear dear dear; dear dear,” said Mr. Wright, with a little click of the tongue which sufficiently bespoke his nationality without the help of the soft, pleasant accent and cheerful brogue that, added to his good-tempered face and genial manner, had carried the Rector through so many difficulties and enabled him to clear triumphantly many an awkward fence. “Now to think of that money having gone all for nothing—positively for nothing, Selina—and the poor dears wanting new dresses so badly, and you looking like a ghost for need of a glass of decent wine.”

“Don’t trouble yourself about me or the children, Dion,” said Mrs. Wright, in

a tone meant to be valiant, but which broke towards the end of the sentence into a hysterical whimper; “you have enough to bear without us—though I must say it seems strange and hard to think we find it so much more difficult to make the two ends meet since you have been a rector than ever we did in the days when you were only a curate.”

This was one of the pleasant fictions with which Mrs. Wright entertained her family and friends.

Since they came together she and her husband had never fitted their expenditure to their income, but in lieu thereof they had fitted the incomes of very many other people to their expenditure, and the children’s dresses and the decent glass of wine so pathetically referred to by Mr. Wright had, as natural consequences, generally been obtainable.

To do Mr. and Mrs. Wright strict justice, during the whole of their married life it did not once occur to either of them that the words for worse and for poorer could have any meaning applicable to themselves. In every single respect—save that they were always in debt—they lived better and fared more sumptuously than their parents had done before them. They had really never been what could be called in absolute poverty, save such as was caused by their own bad management; but the reason, beyond bad management, of the chronic difficulties in which they were involved was that neither understood the meaning of the sentence “doing without.”

They could do without of course when they were compelled to do so, but given that Mrs. Wright had five pounds—a not unusual occurrence, by the way—and she

was quite certain to spend the greater part of the amount on a fancy, not a necessary.

In a word she worked herself up over their debts and their duns to a state of nervous excitement which even the typical glass of wine failed to subdue, and all the while the beer went unpaid for; and in like manner, when the doctor's tonics proved unavailing, Mr. Wright was wont, in the happy days when people spoke of him as a struggling curate, to bring her home mock turtle from Scarlett's and grapes from Moses'—the time a noisy butcher was clamouring for payment for the family surloin, and the greengrocer thought people ought not to eat a peck of potatoes a day if they never intended settling for them.

Upon what principle it was that the Rev. Dionysius and Mrs. Wright had

made up their minds society was bound to maintain them no one ever could tell, unless, indeed, it was because they had a quiver full of children.

So exclusively personal an affair might not in the hands of less skilful manipulators have proved a peg strong enough whereon to hang claims for money, clothes, food, house rent, taxes and any other trifles which they found necessary to their comfort and well-being; but the Wrights were very skilful.

Had the mandate to replenish the earth been just issued, had the Deluge only just subsided, had there been no surplus population, had babies not been appearing at extremely short intervals upon the face of the earth for nearly six thousand years, had there seemed any immediate danger of the human race coming to an untimely end, the Wrights

could not possibly have comported themselves more like benefactors to the world than was the case.

“God has been very good to them,” said an old nurse, who, after living with Mrs. Wright’s mother for a score of years, came over to see that Miss Selina’s children were properly cared for. “He took seven to himself.”

Which was quite true. Nevertheless, after deducting the defunct seven, nine remained. “Of as fine boys and girls as you would wish to see,” the Rev. Dion was wont to remark.

Whether they were fine or not might, despite the reverend gentleman’s dictum, be a matter of opinion; but there could be no doubt that scarcely any one ever did wish to see them.

Of their mother’s *savoir-faire*—of their father’s joviality—of the combined light-

heartedness of both parents, they had not inherited a trace.

Excepting during the Sunday services, the life of an ordinary clergyman is essentially one of small things. The doings, and sayings, and affairs of persons whose doings, sayings, and affairs are usually, and discreetly ignored, form, as many of us are unhappily aware, the staple of conversation in most parsonages—and the gossip of daily life is not always edifying for children to hear. Further, the young Wrights were priggish and self-conscious, as the sons and daughters of clergymen often are in their innocent teens—a little proud also, and very much disposed to give themselves airs on the strength of their pedigree.

Wherever they went, and in the way of his profession, Mr. Wright had to make many homes for his family, the

young ladies and gentlemen were rather apt to hold their heads very high and to turn unequivocal cold shoulders to persons whom they were pleased to consider as not quite on a level with themselves.

“Comes from the mother’s family,” Mr. Wright was wont to explain apologetically when any of these pleasant ways gave offence in quarters where it was desirable offence should not be given. “Poor dear old Mr. Curran was the proudest man I ever met—most ridiculously proud—Irish pride, you understand. Though Irish myself, and come of decent enough people—Admiral Wright, who did such good service at Trafalgar, was my father’s cousin, and my mother’s aunt married a nephew of the fourth Lord Castlebar—I am thankful to say I know nothing of the feeling—self-respect is enough for me. But, as I was saying,

my children inherit the failing from their mother's family ; poor dears ! the world will soon teach them better. They will understand, ere many years pass, how much happier it would have been for them if their father had been a cheese-monger, or something of that sort, than a clergyman possessed of a few poor talents which he has tried not to hide in a napkin."

Whatever claim Mr. Wright's progenitors may have had to social consideration in the days of the Admiral and Lord Castlebar's nephew, it is quite certain there was not much in his own youthful reminiscences calculated to justify so slighting an observation, even concerning a man who wore an apron and stood behind a counter.

But many a mile stretched between Ireland and England, and many a year

between Mr. Wright's boyhood and the time when he was presented to the living of Fisherton.

"A poor thing," he said confidentially. "His Lordship might just as well have given me one nearer town and worth a couple of hundred a year more."

But this really was scarcely grateful on the part of Mr. Wright, considering he had written to "His Lordship"—in whose gift the living was—with tears in his eyes, a letter of thanks, part of which ran as follows :—

"Your lordship's note, received this morning, and read with feelings of mingled thankfulness and astonishment, marks the beginning of a new epoch in the life of myself and family.

"The cruel bugbear which has hitherto haunted my life, prostrating my energies

and nullifying my efforts for the benefit of my fellow-creatures, has been banished by your lordship for ever. I see a future of as utter peace and contentment as this poor world can afford stretching out before me, like sunshine lighting up a fair valley. The prayers of myself and my family will ascend night and morning for the prosperity and happiness, temporal and eternal, of my noble and generous patron to whom I beg to subscribe myself,

“ His Lordship’s devoted and grateful
servant,

“ DIONYSIUS WRIGHT.”

And, after all, poor Mr. Wright did not find himself in a land of peace ; he was met in the fair valley with that serious difficulty of which I shall have more to say in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.

“JUST LIKE AN INSPIRATION.”

THE Rev. Mr. Wright had some curious ideas on the subject of time. When he was expecting money, weeks lengthened themselves out into months. When any one else was expecting money from him, months shrank into weeks.

“I give you my honour,” he was wont to remark, “it does not seem ten days since I signed that note which you tell me is now due. Oh! of course you are right. I do not dispute the accuracy of your statement for a moment, but I really am taken quite by surprise.” And then

Mr. Wright would gently move aside the obnoxious document his creditor wished him to examine, and say, "Dear, dear, dear! what am I to do? Cannot you suggest any way out of the difficulty, my good, kind friend?"

Sometimes the good, kind friend would offer to renew the bill, but sometimes he resolutely refused to suggest any way out of the difficulty, except that Mr. Wright should hand him over the amount due, in which latter case Mr. Wright had to appeal to one of his many other good, kind friends, and repeat his statement concerning the extraordinary way in which the three or four months had fled by, supplementing that lamentation with an emphatic statement that he ought to have received his own salary or the interest on his wife's fortune four weeks previous to the moment when he

was speaking, and that neither had yet been remitted to him.

It would have been a most extraordinary thing if the interest on Mrs. Wright's modest portion had reached him, seeing that within six months of their marriage they had transferred it for a period of five years—a process which at the end of that period bore repetition, and had gone on bearing repetition during the nineteen summers and winters of what they both were in the habit of calling their “happy wedded life.”

And indeed they had been very happy till they came to Fisherton. When they first came to Fisherton they were very happy also. They laid out all sorts of plans for the future. “First and foremost,” said the genial Dionysius, “we must repay every farthing the generous Samaritans have lent or given for our use.”

"I don't think I should, dear," remarked Mrs. Wright. "I am sure none of them ever gave with any idea of return. They knew perfectly well how we were situated. I am certain we never made any false pretences. Whatever they spared to us was lent to the Lord; and we know He won't forget it to them."

"And He has not forgotten us, Selina," Mr. Wright replied, a little severely, pointing at the same time to the rectory garden, which sloped down to the Thames. "And we must not forget that some of our benefactors gave out of their little instead of their abundance."

"Very well, Dion; I suppose you know best," said Mrs. Wright, in a tone which implied she supposed nothing of the sort. She was a more practical person in some respects than he, and knew perfectly well a moonlight view of the river would not

provide butcher's meat for a growing-up family.

In the first excitement of his new position, with sovereigns in his pocket, she thought it possible her husband might be so Quixotic as to send back money to people “who did not expect it, and who did not need it;” but her doubt of Mr. Wright's personal prudence was not well founded.

It is quite true that he did actually procure a post-office order for five shillings, and send that order to a very dear friend who had lent it to him the day he received his Lordship's letter: but there Mr. Wright's voluntary honesty began and ended. And perhaps it was quite as well for the good Samaritans that he stopped at that point, as he certainly would eventually have made his repayments then the basis for future operations on a much more extensive scale.

Never, probably, before in their lives had Mr. and Mrs. Wright been so flush of money as when they took up their residence at Fisherton. A grateful congregation had presented the Reverend Dionysius with a purse containing one hundred and eighty sovereigns, as a token of their affection and esteem, and to the husband and wife it seemed that such a sum was practically inexhaustible. They acted as if it were so, at all events. Mr. Wright thought that his poor dear Selina required a thorough change of air, and poor dear Selina was quite certain he wanted change more than she did. As for the children, it went without saying that they needed change more than anybody; and so the whole family travelled to the seaside; and it was the joint opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Wright that the man who could see the

innocent enjoyment of the young people and grudge it to them must possess a heart hard as the nether millstone. They arrived at this decision in consequence of a tailor, who happened unfortunately to have selected the same watering-place for his holiday, remarking to Mr. Wright that he—the tailor—thought that if a man could afford to hire flies and boats he might manage to pay his debts.

"There must be a bitter drop in every cup," said Mrs. Wright; and there can be no doubt that the democratic and disgusting practice of tradespeople going out of town, just as if they were their own customers instead of mere shopkeepers, was a very bitter drop in hers.

"It is really very hard," she often observed, "that, go where one will, one never can get away from London."

At Fisherton, at all events, Mr. Wright

found he could not get away from London. There his debts followed him, and as he dared not commence his new life in a strange place amongst fresh people, in the capacity of spiritual shepherd-in-chief, with writs hovering about his door and bailiffs waylaying him along the foot-paths, he had to make a virtue of necessity — pay as much as he could in cash, and give promissory notes for the balance.

What was left of the hundred and eighty pounds, after Mr. and Mrs. Wright returned from their holiday, did not go far in the way of setting their worldly affairs in order.

“They could just as easily have made it another hundred,” sighed Mr. Wright, whose gratitude never survived the spending of the last given, begged, or borrowed sovereign. “What would another hun-

dred have been to them?—nothing. And I am sure I worked in that parish like a galley-slave.”

And this was quite true. In whatever parish Mr. Wright chanced to be placed he did not stint his labour; but then other clergymen worked hard also, while for them was not even the purse—to say nothing of the hundred and eighty sovereigns. At all events, nothing now remained of that testimonial for which Mr. Wright had with tears thanked his beloved friends. The old debts had only been reduced about one-fifth, and it was clear, even to the mind of Mr. Wright himself, that he never could manage to feed and clothe his family, to get rid of his old creditors—who, he said to Mrs. Wright, were “mere leeches, sucking his heart’s blood”—to maintain a respectable appearance before the world,

and to provide a few little luxuries for Selina, his wife, on three hundred and fifty pounds a year and a free house.

“Other people do it, though,” he remarked to his better half.

“But *how*?” asked Mrs. Wright significantly. “By pinching, and saving, and practising all sorts of meannesses, calculated to bring the Church into disrepute. I am sure, Dion, you would not have done half so much good amongst the poor as has been the case, had you gone about in old shabby clothes and cotton gloves like poor Mr. Seymour; or if I had allowed the children to wear checked pinafores, and helped with the housework, as little Mrs. Manners boasts that hers do. I say a clergyman is worse than useless unless he is a gentleman also; and to be thought a gentleman in England a man must, at any inconvenience, main-

tain a respectable appearance. We have been wonderfully supported; and I can see no reason why we should fail now. There are other livings in England besides Fisherton, and, if we can only manage to preserve our position here as we have done everywhere else so far, I am positive you won't be forgotten. Wherever we may be placed, a man of your talents cannot hide his light under a bushel.”

Which sounded pleasant in Mr. Wright's ears. When he was busy making up his charitable accounts, or writing begging letters for the support of the schools, the lying-in charity, the Dorcas club, the mother's improvement society, or any other one of the admirable institutions he, in conjunction with his wife, always established wherever they went, it was Mrs. Wright's practice to sit in his study,

and indulge in long statements, such as that just recorded.

As she could not preach, and did not write books, and was sufficiently domestic to have no inclination to lecture in public, she contented herself with instructing her husband on various subjects wherein she considered his views wavering or unsound.

There were times, for instance, when poor Mr. Wright, who had personally to endure the insolence of creditors, the threats of lawyers, the dread of arrest, and the horror of impending bankruptcy, could have found it in his heart to wear cotton gloves, and permit his children to appear in checked pinafores, had such sacrifices been necessary in order to compass deliverance from debt.

There had been moments in his life when he doubted the expediency of having friends to stay in the house; and

when he marvelled whether, with her superior mind and wonderful store of accomplishments, his wife might not have instructed her girls, and so saved the expense of that visiting governess, whose quarter days appeared to Mr. Wright to come round every three weeks.

But at such moments Mrs. Wright was at hand to point out the error of his ways, and to prove to him that if he ever wished to be rich, prosperous, and respected—if he desired his girls to marry well and his sons to succeed in life, he must be prepared to face even worse difficulties in order to maintain that place in society which Mrs. Wright piqued herself, and justly, upon having maintained intact, for nineteen years, through storm and sunshine, good report, of the poor, and bad report of malicious grocers and bakers, and other people of the same rank in life,

who "seemed," so Mrs. Wright was wont to declare, with a sigh, "to have no gratitude in them."

And no doubt Mrs. Wright was quite right in what she said. If social consideration could make up to a man for the loss of all self-respect, of all honest pride, of every scrap of independent feeling—for the misery of being dunned, for the disgrace of debt, for the discomfort of having to regard every rich acquaintance he made as a mere sponge, which he must eventually squeeze, Mr. Wright had his reward.

He was bidden to great houses, and received there as a welcome guest. He had game sent him till the very children grew sick of the taste of it. Choice wines were often left at his house, with a polite note hoping Mrs. Wright would find the particular vintage aid in restoring her to

health. Interest was made to get his children into the Charterhouse, or the Navy, or anywhere else “off his hands.” Whilst all the time Jones, in the next parish, or it might sometimes be even in the same, honestly paying his way, and finding it a grievous struggle to do so, was left out in the cold with never an invitation to dinner to bless himself withal; whilst his wife had to struggle through her illnesses as best she could, and nurse the children, and pay their school bills, and clothe them respectably, without help from anybody—unless, indeed, Mr. Wright sent round a pheasant, or a few grapes, or a bottle of old port, with his very kind regards.

For they were not mean, these people—nay, they were generous with everything except their own money. With the goods of others they were very generous

indeed ; the sick and needy never left the door of any house they inhabited, empty-handed. Moreover, they carried from parish to parish a lengthening string of dependents with them ; having, for instance, at Fisherton a series of humble visitors who stayed at the rectory a few days or a few weeks, as the case might be—the consumptive dressmaker from St. Giles’ ; that poor rheumatic laundress from Blackfriars ; “ that honest old creature Dobbs,” whose acquaintance they had made in the north of London ; and “ that most unfortunate of schoolmasters, Brooks,” for whom Mr. Wright had conceived a compassionate sort of attachment whilst both men were temporarily enjoying the questionable comforts of the Cripplegate Hotel ; all of which produced a great effect in fresh neighbourhoods in favour of the newcomers.

"That is what I call Christianity," Mr. Cleaver would at such seasons declare, when some pauper delivered an order from Mr. or Mrs. Wright for so many pounds of gravy beef to be supplied to the bearer and charged to their account; but at the end of a twelvemonth the butcher generally expressed himself differently.

"Don't talk about your Christianity to me," he frequently entreated. "Christianity is acting right between man and man, ain't it? Christianity is paying its way honest. Christianity ain't sending children out with lies in their mouths, that 'mamma is ill in bed,' or 'papa is busy with his sermon, and can't be disturbed,' when a man calls and asks civilly for his own. Give to the poor, indeed! Who gives, I'd like to know? You and me. And we get none of the thanks. It is easy enough to give if you put your hand in another

man's pocket and take his money or his goods to give with."

And really there was a considerable amount of justice in this, which Mr. and Mrs. Wright called "the tradesman's view of the case."

"Just as if we were swindlers, and never intended to pay our lawful debts," remarked the lady; and the gentleman followed suit, though perhaps with less indignation. It may have struck him that a long deferred "sometime" means occasionally to a shopkeeper, who cannot carry his day-books and ledgers into Eternity with him, very much the same thing as "never."

There was one creditor of Mr. Wright's, however, who did not intend to wait for his money till Eternity, nor even for a very long period of time—that same creditor to whom reference was made in the last

chapter, as holding various promissory notes signed by the Rector of Fisherton.

With their accustomed rapidity, when anything disagreeable was borne on their wings, the weeks and the months flew round; and Mr. Wright assured the clerk who presented his first "promise to pay," under the new arrangement, that he had never been so much surprised in his life.

"I am sure I thought the bill was due next month," he said. "I cannot imagine how I could have made such a mistake. Dear me! I am very sorry. I would not have disappointed your worthy employer upon any consideration."

And he was so very sorry; so grieved for the vain journey the young man had undertaken; so remorseful about his own lack of method; so hospitably insistent upon his unwelcome guest having some-

thing to eat, if only a mouthful of bread and cheese and a glass of porter—that the clerk returned to London perfectly charmed with the Rector, and willing to take a hundred affidavits, if necessary, as to his utter good faith and honesty.

The solicitor, who had some experience of Mr. Wright, only laughed, and said, “Well, write to say he shall have the month, but that the money must be then forthcoming.”

At the end of the month, Mrs. Wright wrote to say, her husband was not at home; that doubtless the matter had escaped his memory. The moment he returned, it should be attended to.

“We shall have to go through the previous ceremonies once again, I see that plainly,” remarked the lawyer. And, without communicating again with Mr. Wright, he “most unhandsomely,” as the

poor clergyman phrased his conduct, served him with another writ.

The man who put it into Mr. Wright's hands, finding him in the first instance “not at home,” had left a message that he wanted to see him about the possibility of having a relative interred at Fisherton; and when the Rector discovered the *ruse*, he rose equal to the occasion and read the fellow such a lecture concerning the enormity of his sin as he had never listened to since he left school.

“I am sorry to have done wrong, sir,” he said penitently and respectfully; “but I was bound to see you, and I didn't want to be wasting my time hanging about the village.”

“My poor fellow,” answered Mr. Wright, with infinite compassion, “if you had only mentioned that you came from such and such an office in London—if you

had hinted in the remotest manner at your real business, I trust I need not say I am too much of a gentleman to have given you needless trouble. There—there—I don't want to add to the distress I am sure you now experience. Only, remember my words—nothing pays so well, even in this world, as perfect straightforwardness and childlike sincerity. My compliments to your employer, and I will see him about this unpleasant affair.”

Which Mr. Wright did. He saw the solicitor, and the solicitor saw his client. The solicitor said his client was inexorable. Mr. Wright then saw the client, who said he had placed the matter in his solicitor's hands, and did not intend to interfere.

Mr. Wright then posted back to the solicitor, who had, following the clergyman's example, gone out of town and was not expected back for a fortnight.

Mr. Wright at once demanded to see the managing clerk, who assured him his instructions were to "go on," and that he had no alternative.

Hearing this, the Rector asked for pen, ink, and paper, and straightway wrote a letter which might have melted the heart even of that tailor who viewed with distaste the spectacle of the Masters and Misses Wright disporting themselves by the sad sea waves.

It did not move this inhuman lawyer, however, who, holding on the even tenor of his legal way, at the end of the orthodox period, took out judgment against the Rector, and then, without "with your leave," or "by your leave," sent down a very humble and yet very powerful visitor to the rectory.

Now, if he could not get rid of this visitor without having those effects

already honourably mentioned sold by auction, Mr. Wright knew his hour was come; and it may safely be said the Rector moved heaven and earth to raise the required amount. But he could not do it. For the first time since he and Selina, daughter of Theophilus Curran, became man and wife, her letters and his letters, her entreaties and his entreaties, proved unavailing. Five pounds was the total result of all their appeals; and as that amount—to quote Mr. Wright's own statement—was “worse than useless,” Mrs. Wright spent it in purchasing some extremely pretty summer dresses for herself and her two eldest girls, which dresses she sent to the Fisherton milliner, stating they must be finished in time for General Grace's picnic party on the 1st.

“That will restore confidence, dear,” she said to the Rev. Dion, “if the people in the village suspect anything.”

The Rev. Dion groaned. He knew well enough the village suspected nothing. Accustomed as Fisherton was to the sight of Lazarus and all his sores at the rectory, they simply regarded the new comer in the light of another London pauper, to whom it pleased Mr. Wright to extend hospitality.

The village did not require to have its confidence restored, but its clergyman did. Mr. Wright could not see his way. Mr. Wright had found that out of sight meant out of mind. Mr. Wright believed people thought three hundred and fifty pounds per annum—a paltry seven pounds a week (and two weeks with nothing)—must be a ducal revenue.

“I can’t understand it at all,” sighed Mr. Wright. “There was a time when, if distress came, I had but to ask and

have ; and now—now, when one's whole future trembles in the scale, there is not a friend to come forward—not a friend who will come forward when he is asked."

But Mr. Wright did understand perfectly. Perpetually advancing, he and his wife had taken no thought for retreat, but pillaged the whole country through which their route lay ; and now, when they wanted to try back, no greenness of verdure greeted their return.

If Mrs. Wright wilfully shut her eyes to facts, Mr. Wright was unable to do so. He recognized now the truth that the testimonial over which he had shed tears, not merely of gratitude, but of pride, was as much an offering of gratitude to Providence as of love to himself ; that while the parishioners felt bound to acknowledge his services, they were

heartily glad to get rid of an active and impecunious curate. The rich men, delighted to pay their last black-mail, hastened to pay it voluntarily; whilst the poor followed the lead of their betters, never questioning.

He could not disguise from himself the fact that he had worked the mine of friendship down almost to the last piece of gold it contained.

People had liked—people had been kind to him; but he had tired them out; and if they failed to say in so many plain words that he was a very lucky fellow to have dropped into Fisherton, their manner implied the same thing, and Mr. Wright felt the implication bitterly. For he did not consider Fisherton equal to his deserts. Fisherton, with a certain income from his living, and an uncertain income from friends, old or new,

might have been tolerable; but Fisherton, sufficiently remote from London to have no rich merchant residents, but only a population living on their settled incomes, or small settled earnings—a population “without a spare ten pounds among them,” filled the Rector with dismay.

No more of the leeks and cucumbers of the goodly city for husband and wife—no more share of great men’s plenty. Only three hundred and fifty pounds a year—less income-tax—old debts to pay off; fresh credit to any large extent, not easily procurable; and “a man in possession.”

It was the last evening but one before his creditor meant to turn the final screw on the Rector. Properly speaking, every chair and table could legally have been sold some days before; but Mr. Wright

had pleaded so hard for another week's grace, and paid so liberally for having it granted, that Reuben, the sheriff's officer, who happened to have the matter in hand, had, on his own responsibility, granted him longer indulgence than was the wont of that merciless Jew.

Now, however, Reuben had told him he could not give him a minute after ten o'clock on the day but one following.

“They are sendin' in to me about it,” explained Mr. Reuben to Mr. Wright, “and I must either have the money, or——”

“Dear, dear, dear!” said the unfortunate Rector, mentally ending the sentence; “it will ruin me.”

“Come, sir, don't take on so,” entreated Mr. Reuben, who had been acquainted (professionally) with the Rector for many years, and found him “quite

the gentleman." "You will get through it all right, never fear. Why, you have got through far worse trouble, to my knowledge."

Mr. Wright was aware of that, but still he did not see how he was to get through this trouble. For the first time in his memory he was placed in a parish where there was not a creature to whom he dare proclaim his need. He might just as well, he felt, be sold up at once as take any one of the Christian friends he addressed each Sunday into his confidence.

"If there had only been a Jew in my district," he thought, "or even a rich dissenter, I might have received assistance." As matters stood Mr. Wright saw no sign of assistance anywhere, and returned to Fisherton almost broken-hearted.

The rectory looked very pretty in the

light of the summer's evening. The Rector thought he had never seen it look so pretty. The church, too, appeared as he passed it more picturesque than usual; and the graveyard, with its billows of green grass, and its few head-stones, seemed inviting in its quiet and repose.

"If it was not for Selina and the children, I should not mind if Reuben were 'taking my body' there this moment," the unfortunate man muttered as he stood contemplating the resting-place of those whose last bed had there been prepared for them. "And, indeed, perhaps Selina and the children would do far better without me—my day seems over."

And then, suddenly remembering his profession, he struck himself lightly on the chest with his closed hand—a trick that had now become habitual with him

—"Wright's roll-call to duty," as an acquaintance styled it—and saying, "God forgive me. After all His mercies too!" he strode on, head erect, umbrella shouldered, to face Selina and tell her the bad result of his day in town.

He found his wife wrapped up in a thin shawl, which once upon a time had been elegant as well as light. That shawl was a sign of misery with poor Mrs. Wright. When she felt "very poorly," or when she was "very wretched," she adjusted that shawl about her long neck and falling shoulders, and bemoaned herself as the Israelites did in sackcloth and ashes.

But, wretched or not, she never reproached Dionysius. She blamed others, but never herself or him; and if he ever dreaded telling her of his want of success, it was only because he could not endure

the sight of her disappointment. Curtain lectures were things for which the perpetual excitement of their lives left no margin. Perhaps that was the balance of happiness for Mr. Wright. 'Heaven knows if he had been cursed with a shrew at home, as he was cursed with duns abroad, he might have wished himself underground. As it was, Mrs. Wright, wrapt up as has been stated, met him at the rectory gate.

"Well, dear, any good news?" she asked.

"None," he answered; "worse than none. Reuben either won't or can't give longer than till ten on Friday morning. He says I have got through worse troubles; and that is true; but we had friends then. We have no friends now."

His voice faltered a little. Perhaps he thought at the moment of that Eastern

story concerning the beggar who received a daily alms for so long a time from his wealthy neighbour, that at last he came to consider it in the light of an annuity.

“Don’t give up yet, Dion,” said his wife. “Help may come to-morrow. We have *all* to-morrow, remember, and who can tell what a day may bring forth? Think what a day has often brought forth for us!”

At that moment Mr. Wright was inclined to look so gloomily on life, that the only events his memory could recall as having been brought forth by a day were unexpected demands for money; but he could not bear to add to his wife’s distress—outwardly represented by the shawl—and so refrained from answer.

“Have you dined?” she inquired. It was an unusual thing for Mr. Wright to return from London luncheonless or

dinnerless, but something in his manner caused her to imagine he had assisted at neither meal.

"I have had all the dinner I want," he replied ; "a roll and a glass of ale."

"But you must eat, or you will be knocked up," she persisted. "There is some nice cold roast beef—or shall I send for a chop, or would you like tea and a rasher of bacon? I think the tea might perhaps do you the most good ; but——"

"I am neither hungry nor thirsty, dear," he answered ; "but still I should like a cup of strong coffee with a teaspoonful of brandy in it—only one spoonful, mind!" he called after his wife, who was inclined sometimes to put a liberal interpretation on Mr. Wright's wishes in such matters.

Left alone, the Rector sat down beside the window of his study, and looked out

over the garden towards the Thames; then, with a groan, he closed his eyes, and leaning back in his chair, fell into a reverie.

From the next room came the maddening sound of "practising." One of his daughters was essaying "*Il mio Tesoro*," playing about one correct note in seven, and trying back perpetually, in order to see if her next venture would be more successful than the last.

Mr. Wright endured the noise as long as he could, but at last the irritation it caused him became so great, that he was just rising to ask Miss Maria to postpone her performance when Mrs. Wright reappeared with the coffee.

"What an in——ahem!—comparable instrument the piano is, when it does not chance to be in the same house with one," remarked Mr. Wright sarcastically.

"I will tell her to stop," said Mrs. Wright. "But you know, dear, the children must practise."

"I don't see why they must do so when I am at home," he answered.

Which was rather unreasonable on Mr. Wright's part, considering he was at home the greater part of each day, and in and out of the house perpetually during those hours he devoted to his parish.

"You have put a great deal too much brandy in this coffee," he said, when his wife returned after silencing Maria's musical efforts.

"Only a spoonful, dear!" she answered, jesuistically.

"It must have been a gravy spoon," he persisted; which, indeed, was short of the truth; but still he finished the cup, and when he had finished said he

felt better for it, and went straight up to his dressing-room.

“ You are not going out again, Dion, are you ? ” asked Mrs. Wright five minutes after, meeting him in the hall, fresh-cravated, brushed, with no speck of London dust visible about his person.

“ Yes, indeed I am,” he replied. “ I am going to Riversdale to ask Mr. Irwin to help us. I don’t know why the idea should have occurred to me, or why it never did before, but I assure you it came just like an inspiration.”

“ Do you think he will lend you the money ? ” said Mrs. Wright doubtfully.

“ I don’t know. I mean to try, at any rate,” answered the Rector. “ He can but refuse.”

Which last was a phrase very often on the lips of Mr. and Mrs. Wright.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCERNING AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSITION.

THERE were good reasons why Mrs. Wright should feel dubious about the success of her husband's application to Mr. Irwin. In the first place, he was not a resident in Fisherton or any of the adjoining parishes, having only taken Riversdale for a couple of months during the temporary absence of Sir John and Lady Giles, who were in the habit of making as much money out of their residence as they possibly could. Mr. Irwin had therefore nothing whatever to do with the neighbourhood; and the

wildest imagination could not conceive that he was likely to take much interest in Mr. Wright, considering he had never seen him except twice, once while fishing in the vicinity of Fisherton rectory, and once when they met accidentally at a dinner-party given by a gentleman resident at Richmond.

Mrs. Wright had called upon Mrs. Irwin, who had not seen fit to return the visit. Mr. Wright had called upon Mr. Irwin, but failed to find him at home, and a like result ensued when Mr. Irwin called upon the Rector. The acquaintance, therefore, was not of a character to raise undue expectations on the subject of assistance. Nevertheless, Mrs. Wright could not but remember how frequently total strangers had come to their rescue, when friends seemed inclined to hold aloof; and it was quite possible, she con-

sidered, Mr. Irwin might be the something brought forth that day.

She was very low, however. For weeks she had eaten little and slept less ; and, accordingly, after her husband's departure she took his chair by the open window, and cried for a time, and then felt better.

Meanwhile Mr. Wright, tired as he was, walked rapidly on towards Riversdale. He had two miles of flat, uninteresting country in which to reconsider his intention, but he never faltered about the matter. He did not know anything concerning Mr. Irwin's position. Whether he was rich or whether he was comparatively poor, the Rector had not an idea. He had one fixed determination, however—if money was to be had out of the gentleman, he, Mr. Wright, would have it.

It was growing quite dusk by the time

he reached Riversdale; but Mr. Irwin still sat over his wine, not drinking much, but thinking deeply. Mr. Wright, who was asked into the dining-room, rejoiced at sight of the decanters, first, because he felt he needed a glass or so of sound dry sherry, such as he prophetically believed to be on the table, and secondly, because he knew by experience how much easier and pleasanter it is to talk to a man who has just dined, than to one who has not.

Mr. Irwin—a tall, melancholy looking man, with a large beard and moustache—greeted the Rector courteously, and remarked, in reply to Mr. Wright's apologies for intruding upon him at so unusual an hour, that a pleasure late, was better than a pleasure never. "And indeed," he went on, "I am so little here during visiting hours, that, excepting in the

evenings, it is difficult to find me at home."

"I am very glad I came to-night, then, instead of to-morrow," said Mr. Wright; "for I am here to ask a favour."

It was one of Mr. Wright's principles to plunge into business at once. He had studied the art of requesting assistance, and mastered it more completely than he had ever done divinity.

"You may depend upon one thing," he confided to a friend, "that it is an entire mistake to defer the evil moment. No amount of preparation can reconcile a man to the fact that you want money; and the only consequence of preparation is, that it gives him time to make up his mind to say 'No.' Further, it has a bad effect in this way: if you tag on a request to the end of an interview, it makes your friends suspicious about all your visits;

for they never can tell what may be at the bottom of your pleasant chat. No; take my advice—ask for what you want, and get ‘Yes’ if you can, and take ‘No’ if you can’t. It is only fair to let a man know the worst at once, and have the matter done with. I always do this when I am begging for a church, or a school, or a charity, or—or anything,” added Mr. Wright; “and I believe I may say I have not generally come away empty-handed.”

Carrying this theory into practise, the Rector, in two minutes after he entered Mr. Irwin’s dining-room, had broken the ice.

Mr. Irwin knew he wanted something, and said that he should be most happy to assist Mr. Wright if in his power.

Of course this might mean much, or it might mean little; and Mr. Wright was

too old a campaigner to suffer his hopes to be excited by such a conventional expression. Nevertheless it answered his purpose to appear to read the words literally, and accordingly, with a deprecating motion of his hand, he entreated Mr. Irwin not to be so hasty in committing himself.

"Because," went on the Rector, "the request I have to make is so extraordinary—on the face of it so almost audacious, that I can hardly be surprised if you utterly refuse to assist me."

"I have already expressed my willingness to further your wishes if in my power," answered Mr. Irwin. "Until I know what it is you want I can scarcely say more or less."

This was not so encouraging, and it confused Mr. Wright a little.

"Perhaps I ought to explain——" he

was beginning, when Mr. Irwin interrupted him—

“If you will excuse my saying so, I think not. If I cannot advance your views, you may regret having entered into useless explanation; if I can, there may be no necessity for explanation at all.”

“You are quite right,” agreed the Rector, taking his cue from the other in a moment. “I want you to lend me fifty pounds—if you can do so without inconvenience.”

“Yes——” said Mr. Irwin, thoughtfully.

That “Yes” did not mean acquiescence, or refusal, or anything except that he understood the nature of the request.

“An abominable ‘Yes,’” as Mr. Wright explained afterwards to his wife, “calculated to take all the courage out of a man, and entirely to stop any remarks

of an entreating nature he might otherwise have felt disposed to utter."

Mr. Irwin did not say another word for a couple of minutes, which seemed to Mr. Wright like two years. He did not even look at his visitor, but kept his eyes, bent on the table, studying—so thought the Rector—how to word his refusal civilly. At last he raised his head and spoke—

"I think I can manage to do what you want—indeed, I will do it. But still, if not unpleasant to you, I should like to know why you require a loan of the kind, and ask it from a comparative stranger."

Was the room reeling round? Had his ears played him false? Was the peril really averted? With one hand Mr. Wright grasped the arm of the chair in which he sat, with the other he tried to unfasten his neckcloth, and failed.

Mr. Irwin rose, and undid it for him,

then opened one of the windows, and pouring out a glass of water, held it to the clergyman's lips.

"You are better now," he said, when Mr. Wright raised his head from the back of the easy chair and looked, with a wistful, bewildered expression, in the face of the man who at that moment represented to him temporal salvation. "Take some wine. I will just leave you while I get my cheque-book. I will return immediately."

Left alone, Mr. Wright, indifferent for once to the fascinations of dry sherry, leaned his head upon both his hands, and tried to realize the fact that deliverance had come at last. Never before, never could he remember having been so totally prostrated by good fortune.

The agony, so long protracted — the relief, so long delayed, had proved too

much even for Mr. Wright; but no stoicism or fluency could have served his turn one-half so well as the physical effect Mr. Irwin beheld produced upon a strong man by mental reaction. About words there might be much doubt, but about that semi-faint there could not lie the suspicion of doubt.

When Mr. Irwin returned he brought back in his hand an open cheque for fifty pounds, which he gave to Mr. Wright.

"Now," he said, reseating himself, "if you like to tell me all about your anxiety, well; if not, we will not speak of it any more."

There was nothing in the world Mr. Wright liked better than talking about his own troubles to a new listener; so, beginning at the beginning, he presented Mr. Irwin with a comprehensive view of his life as a husband, a curate, and a

rector. He gave his host a succinct account of the origin and progress of the especial trouble which induced him to come to Riversdale. And Mr. Irwin paid undivided attention to the narrative, and drew his own conclusions from it—some of which were right, and some of which were wrong.

With the fifty-pound cheque safely lodged in his purse, with a good glass of wine beside him, and a sympathizing listener, rich enough to help and willing to do so, as he had already proved, the haunting figure of the unwelcome guest located at the rectory was already growing dim in Mr. Wright's memory, and Dionysius was himself again.

Mr. Irwin felt irresistibly attracted towards his visitor. The apparent frankness and the real buoyancy of his nature were very pleasant to the man who

hearkened to the Rector's exposition ; and it was quite half an hour before he effectually stopped the flow of Mr. Wright's eloquence, by inquiring—

“ Will you forgive my asking what you mean to do when the next instalment of this debt is due ? ”

Now, if Mr. Wright had spoken out his mind, he would have answered, he thought it extremely probable the dear, kind friend, who sat facing him, might be induced to come to the rescue once again ; but judging that Mr. Irwin would probably consider such an amount of candour premature, he merely said that he intended to put aside sufficient to pay this importunate creditor and get rid of him, no matter who else went to the wall.

“ If we have all to live on bread and water,” finished Mr. Wright, buttoning

up his coat, preparatory to facing the night air, "we will be prepared for him next time, please God!"

Mr. Irwin smiled—he could not help doing so. There was such a discrepancy between Mr. Wright's appearance and the fare indicated, that he could not but admire the final saving appeal by which the Rector left a way out of the difficulty: since, if Providence did not approve, even a diet of bread and water would naturally be insufficient to enable the family to meet their engagements.

Mr. Wright saw the smile, and involuntarily his own face reflected it.

"But, upon my honour, I am quite in earnest," he said, answering Mr. Irwin's unspoken thought. "I would not endure what I have endured latterly if any personal privation could secure me from such a trial."

"That I can well believe," agreed the other, who, indeed, could not conceive of any human being in his senses running such a risk a second time.

"I suppose you will be in town to-morrow?" suggested Mr. Irwin, as he walked slowly beside his visitor to the outer gates.

Mr. Wright replied that such was his intention.

"I wish, then," said Mr. Irwin, "that if you happen to be passing my office, you would give me the opportunity of a little conversation. I think I might be able to put something in your way that may prove an acceptable addition to your income."

And with that they parted, Mr. Irwin to smoke a solitary cigar whilst he paced up and down beside the river, Mr. Wright to traverse the two miles home, as un-

weariedly as though he had been treading on air.

“Il mio Tesoro” was in full progress when he re-entered the rectory—another daughter having taken possession of the music-stool; but if the first performer in Europe had been playing the air, Mr. Wright could not have hummed a vague second to the air with greater approval and enjoyment.

“Very good—very good indeed, my child,” he said, patting his sixth-born on the shoulder, which, perhaps, was a little hard on Maria, seeing her sister played even worse than she. “Selina, my love—one moment——” and husband and wife passed together into the study.

“Oh! Dion, you have got it!” she said; and then began to sob hysterically, while Mr. Wright stood silent, so great and

overpowering was the sense of merciful deliverance which again came over him.

It was Mrs. Wright who first spoke.

“We ought never to be faithless again. It seems to me we are worse than heathens ever to doubt, even in our greatest extremity;” and she paused, expecting her husband to agree in the sentiment expressed.

But Mr. Wright held his peace. He must have been much less astute than was actually the case, if, spite of all his efforts at self-deception, it had not occasionally occurred to him that a creed which contained no sentence concerning personal works might be as dangerous, though apparently less presumptuous, than one composed entirely of faith in them.

Next morning the Rector was early astir.

“Let me have a cup of coffee, Mary,”

he said to the cook ; "and don't disturb your mistress. I want to catch the eight o'clock train ; tell her I shall be back as soon as possible."

So, Mr. Wright. If there were anything beautiful in that house, it was the consideration of wife for husband—of husband for wife—of both for children. Short-sighted they may have been in many respects, but selfish personally as regarded each other most undoubtedly they were not.

Against the outside world they warred with genial manners and pleasant faces ; but at home they were at peace, which was perhaps the reason why the outside world, seeing so little domestic union elsewhere, was inclined to forget to be merciful to their offences.

That was a very different journey from the one he had undertaken the pre-

vious morning, and Mr. Wright's spirits rose accordingly. It was quite a sight to behold the way in which he returned the greetings of those of his parishioners he happened to meet on his way to the station; and when he handed Mr. Irwin's cheque over the counter, the tone in which he said, "Short, if you please," was that of a man accustomed to deal with thousands.

After he had settled with Reuben, who laughed knowingly when he saw the note, and remarked, "It was fortunate when a man had good friends," Mr. Wright betook himself to Eastcheap, where Mr. Irwin's offices were situated.

Asking for his new friend, he was ushered into a small office, where an old man sat, with his hat on, writing at a shabby baize-covered table. At sight of Mr. Wright's portly figure he removed his hat, and greeted the visitor with—

"Servant, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I beg your pardon," answered Mr. Wright, in his most courtly manner, "but I expected to find another Mr. Irwin."

"My son-in-law, perhaps," suggested the other. "Here, Hammond!" he shouted to a clerk in the warehouse, "take this gentleman up to Mr. Walter's room. Good morning, sir;" and he put on his hat again and resumed his correspondence.

The premises occupied by Messrs. Irwin were old, dilapidated, and quaint. The house, or rather houses, in which they carried on their business had evidently been at some time not remote inhabited as private dwellings, and the apartments now used as workrooms and offices were wainscoted, whilst over the

ancient mantelpieces were panels curiously festooned with carved flowers and leaves, from amongst which peeped forth the faces of fat Cupids, black with smoke, grimed with the dirt of years.

“I have been thinking over our conversation last night,” said Mr. Irwin, after hearing Mr. Wright’s account of his interview with Reuben, “and wondering whether you would entertain an idea which suggested itself to me at the time. I want to find a suitable residence for a young lady—my niece, in fact. She is now, and has for some years past, been at a school in France; but I am desirous to make some different arrangement for her future. When you were speaking of the difficulty you experienced in making both ends meet, it crossed my mind that perhaps Mrs. Wright would not object to receive her. I would pay a hundred a

year for her board, and so forth, exclusive of any sum which might be necessary for lessons. She is a nice, quiet girl, and, except myself, utterly alone in the world."

He looked at Mr. Wright as he concluded, and, despite the clergyman's usual command of countenance, read in his face utter, blank disappointment.

The truth was, Mr. Wright had gone to Eastcheap expecting some great piece of preferment. A lectureship was the most modest idea he conceived of Mr. Irwin's intentions, while a possible bishopric had gleamed with the morning sun upon him.

And to have all of these visions reduced to the proposal of taking a vague girl into his house for the sum of a paltry hundred a year tried the Rector's powers of dissimulation too severely.

"You do not like the idea, I see,"

remarked Mr. Irwin. "I can well understand your objection. Let us say no more about my proposal."

"My dear sir—my kind friend—pray do me justice. Even if your proposition were disagreeable, which it is not, I should not be so ungrateful, so stupid as to decline it without full consideration. You took me by surprise, that was all; and to be quite candid, it appeared to me that there might be difficulties in the way of such an arrangement. I should, however, like to talk the matter over with Mrs. Wright. After all, it is an affair which belongs more to her department than to mine."

"Of course," answered Mr. Irwin; "but pray remember one thing—don't take the girl because you imagine I have any claim upon you. I want the affair to be conducted upon a strictly business

footing ; and if Mrs. Wright can manage, in the event of her consenting to take charge of my niece, to give a little motherly love to a most desolate child, I shall be very grateful to her. That is all. Let me have your decision in a week."

"Do I understand that the young lady is an orphan?" inquired Mr. Wright.

"She is utterly alone in the world, excepting myself," was the answer. "She has neither sister nor brother, nor any one," finished Mr. Irwin.

"She is his own child," thought Mr. Wright; but he only said, "Poor dear; how sad. How my wife would love her if we are only able to get over those little difficulties which, as you can well understand, our peculiar position could not fail to cause—domestic details and so forth—but I won't trouble you about such matters. This day week, then.—Oh! by

the bye, I have brought you an acknowledgment of that money"—and he placed a sealed letter in Mr. Irwin's hands. "I never can thank you sufficiently. Good-bye—good-bye—don't come downstairs with me on any account. Good-bye;" and the Rector was gone.

Mr. Irwin stood for a minute after his departure looking, with bent brows, at the letter Mr. Wright had given him; then he broke the seal and read the epistle. After he had done so his face cleared; and saying, "They will take her," he put the letter and acknowledgment in a private drawer and locked it.

Mr. Wright's epistle was commendably short; but it was undeniably judicious.

"MY VERY DEAR SIR" (so the note began),

"It is my duty to send you a formal

acknowledgment of the generous loan which has rescued myself and my family from disgrace and ruin—for I may at some time be in a position to refund the amount—although if I am you shall have no occasion to put it in force. God bless and preserve you, my kind benefactor.

“Ever your grateful and obliged,

“DIONYSIUS WRIGHT.”

The Rector returned home not quite satisfied with his own conduct about Mr. Irwin's offer.

“Selina will put me right,” he considered. “We will talk it over to-night when the children are out of the way. I won't go into the subject till we can discuss it fully.”

The first thing to do was to get rid of Mr. Reuben's man; and the Rector accordingly sent for him to the study,

where he delivered his employer's note, which ran as follows :—

“DAVIS,

“Quit possession.

“G. REUBEN.”

“I am sure I am very glad indeed, sir, to see this,” said the man.

“Thank you, I know you are,” answered the Rector loftily. “Here is a trifle for yourself;” and he put half-a-crown into his hand.

The man looked at it and then at Mr. Wright.

“Well,” said the Rector.

“If you remember, sir, I have come in for family prayers—and gone twice to church to save appearances, although I had no right to leave the house—and I thought, sir, perhaps you would take all that into consideration. Prayers is things

I have not been accustomed to ; and I can safely say that go to church before I never did to oblige any gentleman living."

" Shocking — shocking — shocking!" commented the Rector. "I really did hope better things of you, Davis ;" then, seeing an expression in the man's face which intimated he had thought better things of the Rector, he gave him another half-crown, and said he hoped he would not get chattering with any one on his way to the station.

That night Mr. and Mrs. Wright thoroughly enjoyed their evening meal.

The children, old and young, were in bed, and the house was perfectly quiet before Mr. Wright repeated to his wife the conversation which had taken place between himself and Mr. Irwin.

" You don't mean to say you hesitated,

Dion!" exclaimed the wiser half, in astonishment.

"Well, you see, my dear——"

"I don't see at all, and I won't see anything, except that you ought to have closed with the offer at once. I wish you could make some excuse, and go to him to-morrow and say we shall be only too glad to have her."

"I can make an excuse," said Mr. Wright, "and save our own dignity as well. Trust me for that, Selina."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. IRWIN WAXES COMMUNICATIVE.

ABOUT noon on the following day Mr. Irwin was somewhat surprised to see the rector of Fisherton enter his office once again.

“Now, pray, pray do not rise,” began the reverend gentleman, hat in one hand, umbrella under his arm, enforcing his entreaty with a persuasive pastoral grasp of his new friend’s nearest shoulder.

“I have not come to disturb you, or to take up the time of a man to whom time is money. I just want to ask one question, and then I will be off.”

He stood on the hearthrug, looking the embodiment of clerical respectability. A novice in the deceptive nature of such appearances might have taken his note of hand as good for a thousand pounds; and even Mr. Irwin, who had seen something of the world and the people in it, found no little difficulty in realizing the fact that, but for his interposition, the rectory goods would have been advertised for sale in that morning's papers.

As if adversity were a cold bath, and a plunge in its waters refreshing, the Rector had come up out of its depths cheerful, rubicund, smiling. The whiteness of his shirt was immaculate, the tie of his cravat a marvel of accuracy of design and neatness of execution, the fit of his coat precisely what the fit of the rector of Fisherton's coat should have been, whilst his hat was new undeniably.

Mr. Wright had indeed bought it by the way.

Yes, here was the man Mr. Irwin needed—a man it seemed impossible wholly to dislike, and equally impossible wholly to respect—a man whom fate could not buffet out of countenance, and who would do anything he honestly could in a decent, even if doubtful, sort of way, to add to his income—a man who would not ask too many questions if it were necessary for him to hold his peace—who could talk, if talk were required, from his mouth, and keep silence if he understood silence meant profit.

So thought Mr. Irwin; and yet the Rector's first move seemed to indicate some error in his premises or his conclusions.

“I mentioned that little matter to Mrs. Wright last night,” said the reverend

gentleman, who had four different ways of designating his better half, according as circumstances required.

"Yes," answered Mr. Irwin, taking refuge behind that detestable monosyllable, as Mr. Wright considered it.

"And of course we feel we should be only too delighted to meet your views, even if such a course did not promise pecuniary advantage to ourselves; but there is one thing—one question——"

"Yes," repeated Mr. Irwin.

"Really, now I am here, it seems such a ridiculous inquiry that I think I shall just go home again, leaving it unmade," said Mr. Wright, who had never in the whole of his varied life believed that one word, and that word "yes," could have proved such a barrier to conversation.

"If I were in your place I should not do anything of the kind," replied Mr.

Irwin. "You came here, as I understand, to ask some question, which now appears to you superfluous. Under any circumstances I should put it."

"You are very good, I am sure. As you advise perfect candour, I will put it. Is there—was there anything peculiar about the birth of the young lady in whose welfare you are so deeply interested?"

The question was so different from anything Mr. Irwin had anticipated, that he stared at his visitor in blank amazement.

"I am not her mother," he answered, "but I have no reason to doubt she came into the world much as other children do, however that may be."

"That is not what I mean," said the Rector, thinking, with a cold shudder, that he had perhaps taken a wrong tack, and that Mr. Irwin was aware of it.

“What do you mean, then?”

“Well, I feel an awkwardness in putting the query into plain words. Cannot you assist me a little?”

“I confess I cannot, unless you help me to understand what you want to know. Have you got an idea that the girl is queer in any way? Because, if you have, I can answer you. She is as sane as either of us, and a dear, good little creature beside.”

“I give you my word such a notion never crossed my mind,” said Mr. Wright heartily. “The fact is, I imagined—that is, I did not imagine, but I thought I should like to know whether the young lady’s parents were—married.”

“Certainly they were. I was present at the marriage.”

“You have taken a load off my mind,” exclaimed the Rector, holding out his

hand, and shaking Mr. Irwin's till that gentleman's fingers tingled. "I am so thankful, though of course I never really felt any apprehension. I am so glad. My dear wife will be so relieved. We shall be delighted to try to fill the place of parents to your orphan niece."

Mr. Irwin took his hand, which the Rector had at length released, into his own custody, and folding its fellow over it said, "As a matter of curiosity, I wish you would tell me how my niece's legitimacy can prove any relief to Mrs. Wright."

"With the greatest pleasure," answered the Rector. "Like myself, my wife is an Irishwoman—that is, I would say——"

"Never mind the bull, Mr. Wright. You will only correct it, I foresee, by saying an Irishman. Mrs. Wright being, like you, an Irishwoman, what follows?"

"Well, you know what Irishwomen are."

"I do in the States. I cannot compliment you on your compatriots there."

"I do not know anything about them in the States," said Mr. Wright a little impatiently.

"What you wish to say, I suppose," suggested Mr. Irwin, "is that Irish women are usually supposed to have a higher standard of morals, and are more capable of acting up to it, than the women of other countries."

"That is it," agreed the Rector; "only you should not have interpolated 'supposed' into your sentence. They have, sir; they are."

"I am quite willing to take your word on both points, Mr. Wright," said Mr. Irwin. "Except as 'helps,' I have no acquaintance with their virtues or vices. Still I ask, what then?"

“Why, only this. My poor dear has passed through sufficient trouble and experienced sufficient sorrow to make her tolerant and pitiful to any sinner. And I think I may safely say, no outcast from society, no deserted creature, no poor wretch plunged in sin and misery, would appeal to her womanly heart in vain. Nevertheless, she has her crotchets. Her father, though one of the kindest men who ever lived, was full of them; and, further, all ladies—Mrs. Irwin, whom I have not the honour of knowing, of course excepted—have their whims and fancies.”

“You need not except Mrs. Irwin. She has her whims and fancies, which, like a good husband, I respect,” was the reply.

“Dear, dear! I am sorry to hear you say that,” remarked Mr. Wright, with more earnest sympathy than Selina might altogether have approved. “Well, then,

talking to a family man—a man blessed, no doubt, with a wife in every respect as admirable as mine, but still aware, from experience, of the peculiarities of the better sex—I may say Mrs. Wright has very strong opinions on the subject we have been discussing. And though I do not mean to say she would decline the responsibility of taking charge of a—hem!—child born out of wedlock, still she would accept the trust in fear and trembling, lest the sin of the mother might be entailed on the child.”

“Do I understand you to say that Mrs. Wright believes, if a woman goes wrong, her child, differently placed, differently educated, differently guarded, kept from temptation, is likely, out of sheer depravity, to go wrong too?”

“You put the matter strongly,” suggested the Rector.

“Do I put it too strongly?” asked Mr. Irwin.

“I do not know that you do,” was the reply. “I told you my wife had her prejudices.”

“Well, it is a very strange notion,” said Mr. Irwin thoughtfully.

“I do not believe,” began the Rector, clearing his throat, “that the idea of mental as well as bodily maladies being hereditary is so singular a one as you seem to imagine. You are a good churchman, as I know, and therefore I need scarcely do more than remind you——”

“Does Mrs. Wright think other sins, besides that of bringing an unfortunate infant into the world which has no place and no name ready for it, are transmitted from parents to children?” asked Mr. Irwin, cutting ruthlessly across the Rector’s meditated discourse. “Take

murder, for instance. There was a man hung at Newgate last Monday. Suppose him to have left a child, do you imagine it likely that child will commit murder also ? ”

“ I trust not, but I should consider the probability of his taking away life greater than in the case of one of my own boys, for instance.”

“ Given, that one of your boys and he were so situated as to start with the same advantages or disadvantages—— ”

“ They could not start the same, he being his father’s son, and my boy being my son,” and Mr. Wright stood virtuously upright, internally thanking God and glorifying himself that his children were not as other children, inasmuch as they called him father, and his wife Selina mother.

“ It is a curious speculation,” said

Mr. Irwin, at length, lifting his head and looking thoughtfully in the Rector's self-satisfied face. "I will not say you are wrong, but I hope you are not right, or else it would be a dreary prospect for philanthropists and social reformers."

"We are all bound to do what lies in our power to make this sinful world better," remarked Mr. Wright; "and by the blessing of Providence, philanthropists, and we poor clergymen, and true Christians like yourself, are able to effect some good even amongst the most depraved classes of society; but it would be worse than folly to shut our eyes to the fact that vice is hereditary—or, if you prefer a milder expression, that most weaknesses are constitutional and capable of transmission. As we say in Ireland, 'The dirty drop will come out,' and it will, too. I could give you fifty instances

in which money, and education, and association have been employed to counteract its influence in vain."

"We have digressed considerably from the subject of my niece," remarked Mr. Irwin. "Am I to understand all obstacles are now removed, or is there any other question you wish to put to me?"

"None, not one," answered the Rector, inflating his chest and rising a little on his toes to give greater emphasis to the utter confidence he reposed in the respectability of Mr. Irwin, and Mr. Irwin's relations.

"So far, so good," said that gentleman; "but now there is an explanation I wish to give to you. It is a necessary explanation, or I should not make it; it is not altogether pleasant, and therefore I must beg that you will regard it as confidential."

"You may say anything to me," replied Mr. Wright. "In the interests of a friend, I can be secret as the grave—silent as the dead——"

"I wish you would sit down," suggested Mr. Irwin.

"My dear friend, why did you not mention that wish sooner?" replied the Rector, seating himself with alacrity. "I know how disagreeable it is to talk up to a man. And now tell me your difficulty—but stop. First, am I, or am I not, to mention the matter to my wife?"

"I think that from so admirable a wife and discreet a lady you ought to have no secrets," was the answer.

"Of my own I have none," said the Rector, which was indeed very true, for Mrs. Wright would never have permitted him to indulge in such a luxury; "unless it may be when I occasionally attempt

a pious fraud and try to make worldly matters look brighter than they really are, so as not to worry the poor soul unnecessarily ; but, bless you, she always finds out that I have been deceiving her. A friend's secret, however, I would, if he desired it, keep safe in my own bosom ;" and Mr. Wright thereupon tapped his chest, which was certainly capacious enough for the purpose indicated.

"We will not exclude Mrs. Wright in this instance," said Mr. Irwin. "What I wish to tell you is that my wife is not aware of my niece's existence."

"She *is* his daughter," thought the Rector, feeling now quite confident upon that point. "Probably the offspring of some youthful, wretched *mésalliance*."

"You don't mean it," he remarked aloud.

"I do mean it," persisted the other.

“I have never mentioned her name to my wife, and if I can avoid doing so, I never shall name it. Some years ago—it does not matter how many—I found myself in the possession of a considerable sum of money, part of which I held in trust for other people, and a portion of which I might have fairly appropriated to my own use. But I had reason for supposing—indeed, for knowing—the money had been acquired by questionable means; and I resolved to employ none of it beyond what might be absolutely needful for the necessities of my position, for my personal pleasure or advancement in life.”

“A resolution which did you honour,” observed the Rector; and a glow of conscious rectitude flushed his face as he mentally considered how much he should like to be placed in a position where he

could not only make such a resolve, but keep it.

“In furtherance of this design,” continued Mr. Irwin, “I went to America, where I obtained employment in the house of Irwin and Son, die-sinkers. Mr. Irwin was an Englishman, originally engaged in business with his brother in the very premises where I am now speaking to you.”

“I follow your words,” said Mr. Wright, as the speaker paused. “I shall understand their meaning presently.”

“In the particular class of work to which he had devoted his life I was not inexperienced—indeed, I may say, without vanity, there are few men who knew more of its mysteries than I; and Mr. Irwin, whose heart was in his trade, took a fancy to me, and eventually placed me in a lucrative and responsible position.

All this time, however, I was his clerk—his servant—what you will that signifies dependence and inequality of rank, and I did not encroach on his kindness—I did not intrude myself on his notice because he was good enough to think me of service in his business. After I had been with him for some time, a terrible affliction befell him. His son—his only son—died. He had loved that son well as his child; but I do think he loved him more as the future representative of Irwin and Son. He moped about, and hugged his grief, and neglected his business, and during that period I managed everything for him—managed so well, that his connection, instead of falling off, extended—the reputation of his house grew. He had one other child, a daughter. Now you begin to comprehend my story. I should not, situated as I was, have

dreamed of aspiring to her hand ; but she honoured me with her regard, her father more than approved of the arrangement, and by marriage I stepped into the name and the place of the dead son.

“ Absent from England, and likely to remain absent for ever, I made no mention to father or daughter of the few relations I possessed. Within a couple of years of my marriage, however, the brother with whom Mr. Irwin had originally been in partnership here died childless, and his fortune and his business passed to the man with whom he had quarrelled forty years previously. Immediately upon this event he was seized with that *maladie du pays* which, sooner or later, afflicts every true-born Briton, and nothing would content him but to dispose of the American business, and return to London and Eastcheap. How

earnestly I entreated that he would let me have the American business, I could not tell you ; but he refused. His whim was to make his name world-known in connection with this establishment, and it was not for me, who owe everything almost I possess to his generosity, to cross such a fancy."

"Certainly not," agreed Mr. Wright promptly, remembering, no doubt, that if old Mr. Irwin's whim had not chanced to bring him across the Atlantic, the rectory would most probably have been stripped of some of its choicest treasures. "The gentleman I had the pleasure of seeing yesterday, then, no doubt is your respected father-in-law ?"

"Yes ; eccentric, but admirable—a just man, a staunch friend, an affectionate father. Happy in his business, in the home he makes in London with us, and

happy, above all, in his grandchildren—in one especially, a boy, who is hereafter to compass wonders in the way of commercial achievement. A cheerful interior, you will think. Yet there is a slight shadow lying over it. My wife's health is wretched. I do not know what is the matter with her, neither do the doctors, neither does she herself. If she had been a poor woman, and compelled to exert herself, it is possible her health might have been better. As matters stand, she has sunk into a state of physical helplessness and mental irritability, which compels us to avoid subjecting her to the slightest annoyance. Were I differently situated—were I a free man, even if a much less wealthy—were my wife strong, and able to share any trouble with me, our house, of course, would be the most fitting home for my niece to come to."

"I understand your position—I recognize the difficulty. You *could not* take her to your own home," remarked Mr. Wright, thinking of his wife Selina, and the hundred a year she had already in the dead of night verbally appropriated to many domestic needs.

"You do not understand all my difficulty yet," continued Mr. Irwin. "I never could have mentioned the existence of this girl, to whom I am, in fact, sole guardian, without entering into a number of details which, for various reasons, are to me fraught with very great pain; and it would be utterly impossible for me to open the subject now without introducing an apple of discord into my home."

"Utterly," agreed Mr. Wright. Sorry indeed would he have been if similarly situated to take such an apple and present it for Selina's acceptance.

“Therefore I judged it better to look out for some family with whom I could place my little niece,” finished Mr. Irwin. “I advertised my requirements, and have had many interviews with various persons in consequence; but all proved more or less unsatisfactory, and I had almost made up my mind to allow her to remain at school for another year, when you came to Riversdale.”

“A most providential visit for me,” murmured the Rector, with a lively memory of the fifty pounds, and a still livelier faith in other fifties he trusted were yet to follow.

“I trust it may prove providential for my niece,” said Mr. Irwin, “for she is a very lonely little woman.”

“Poor dear!” ejaculated Mr. Wright. “It shall not be our fault, Mr. Irwin, if she is not happy in our humble home—that I promise you.”

"Thank you," said Mr. Irwin. "I am sure you will fulfil your promise ;" and the pair shook hands once more.

"By the bye," remarked the Rector returning after he reached the first landing, and putting his head inside the door again, "you have not yet told me the young lady's name."

"Miles," was the reply.

"Not her Christian name, surely!" exclaimed Mr. Wright, to whom the cognomen was familiar enough in his own dear land."

"That is Bella.

"Bella Miles," repeated the Rector. "I shall not forget. Much obliged. Good morning."

END OF VOL. I.





